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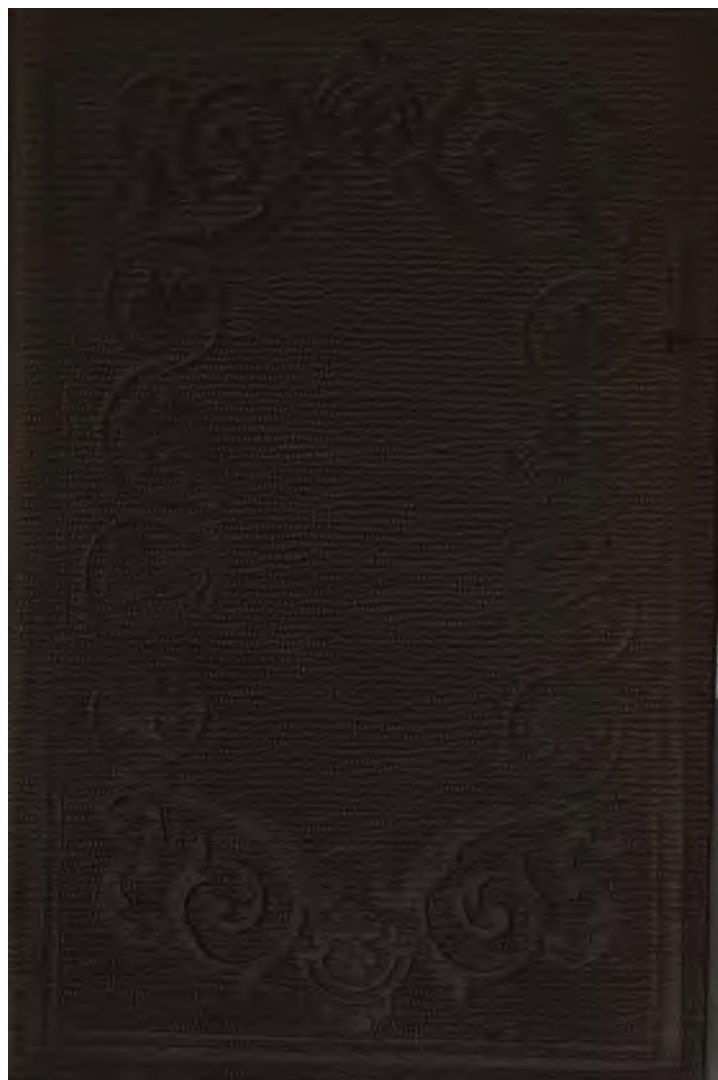
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THE LODGERS.

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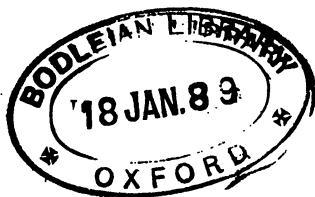
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THE LODGERS.

CHAPTER I.

IN a quiet street, on the outskirts of Islington, once lived two middle-aged maiden sisters of the name of Hone. They rented two rooms, the first-floor of a house belonging to an old couple named Jenkins.

Martha Hone, the elder of the sisters, had in her youth been engaged to be married to a respectable worthy young man, whose station in life was rather higher than her own.

While preparations were being made for their union, the lover was seized with a severe illness, which ended in decline. Before his death he settled upon Martha all the property he had in his power to leave to her.

It consisted of the useful furniture, plate, &c., which he had provided for setting up housekeeping, and money in the Bank of England, producing about twenty pounds a-year interest.

This sum was the sole certain income of the Hones; but the sisters were both very clever at their needle, and had now for some years been employed in working for one of those superior ready-made linen-warehouses whose proprietors pay their work-women fairly and punctually.

With this help from their own earnings, and by strict economy, the sisters seldom wanted either a plain meal or neat and respectable clothing; and few old maids in all Islington were either more cheerful or contented with their lot than Martha Hone.

Not so Rebecca, her sister, some years her junior. Yet, strange enough, Rebecca was remarkably strong and healthy for one no longer in the bloom of life, while Martha was often a sufferer from delicate health, and sometimes found it difficult, without extreme fatigue, to sit for many hours together at her needlework.

"What a broiling sun there is to-day!" cried Rebecca, one warm summer's afternoon. "I feel quite stifled in this close small room. I wish, I'm sure, I'd settled with Mrs. Smith to work at the warehouse, instead of bringing my jobs home *to this poking place.*"

"Can't you tell her," observed Martha in a mild voice, "that you have changed your mind, Becky, about wishing to work at home?"

"No, I can't, for Mrs. Smith said only yesterday week she had only a seat left for one in the work-room; and when I refused it Ann Farr caught at it directly. Don't you know, I told you, since old Mrs. Smith gave up the business to her son's wife, there's all sorts of new-fangled rules, and only a set number of hands are allowed to be in one room."

"What a good thing!" said Martha. "You remember, sister, how all the women used to complain formerly that the rooms were so crowded the air was not fit to breathe; and how sickly many were!"

"There's many a one there, though, that's anything but best pleased with all these chop-pings and changings. You know, some people are never content whatever's done for them. There's Barbara Giles grumbling away, they tell me, from morning till night because Mrs. Samuel Smith has taken her out of the back room on account of the light being bad for her sore eyes. I never, in all my life, heard of such a discontented worry of a woman as she is."

Poor Martha could not help thinking to herself,—“Oh, how I wish Rebecca could learn from Barbara's faults to look at home and find out her own.”

"It's getting hotter and hotter," cried Becky, impatiently, "I don't get on at all. I can't roll this whip for these fine cambric shirt frills fit to be seen. I'm sure my fingers are clean

enough, but who would think it to look at this work !”

“ My hands are quite cool. Give me the cambric to finish, Becky, and you take this calico dressing-gown.”

“ Oh, no, I thank you ; I can’t bear that nasty stiff calico. I’m sure my sticky needle would never go through it. I should be five minutes hemming an inch.”

“ Wouldn’t you find it fresher in the next room ?” asked Martha quietly. “ There’s no sun there at any rate, and there won’t be for many hours.”

“ Don’t you think I know that as well as you, Patty ? but if there’s no sun, there’s no air, and that’s worse.”

“ If you will open the bed-room window wide, dear, you will find the wind sets at the back of the house to-day.”

“ Open the window, indeed ! on a Tuesday,” cried Rebecca, snappishly, “ when the smoke from that nasty low chimney of Fenn’s wash-house opposite is making the blacks fly about as thick as dust. A pretty trim my fine cambric work would be in if I sat doing it by that open window. I should just like to see myself taking it home to Mrs. Samuel Smith. I suspect it would be the last job of the kind I should get from her in a hurry.”

Martha said nothing to this speech, but getting up, went to a small chest of drawers, and taking out a nice dark green shawl, she pinned it up carefully over the white curtain before the window, thus *completely shading* the sun from her sister’s fire

There was self-denial in this trifling act of kindness, for Martha was an exceedingly neat person, and very particular (as it is called) about her dress. The shawl was her only decent Sunday one, and she would have suffered herself to be half blinded by the sun before she would have hung it up as a curtain to save her own eyes.

Rebecca took no notice of her sister's good-nature; but it had the effect of putting a stop to her grumbling, and thus Martha was left at peace to go on with her work more quickly.

Just before the usual hour of tea, when the sisters were putting aside their work, a tap was heard at the door, and Mrs. Jenkins, their landlady, came in.

She was a civil bustling elderly woman, and had the reputation of being much too fond of money. The neighbours who had any dealings with her in the way of trade, declared there was not a person in the street who knew better than Mrs. Jenkins how to drive a hard bargain, and some of her acquaintance had been surprised when they found she had let her best apartments to the Hones for a lower rent than she had received from the lodgers who preceded them.

Mrs. Jenkins, however, was not penny wise and pound foolish, and she wisely judged that two quiet single women, with a small certain income, were the very best lodgers to whom she could let her rooms, since they would not be likely to injure her property, and her rent would be secure.

This was Midsummer-day, and Mrs. Jenkins had called for the quarter's rent. As usual, ~~they~~

sum was already neatly folded up in paper, and lying on the end of the mantel-shelf on the rent-book.

As soon as this little business was settled and the money safe in Mrs. Jenkins's purse, she thus began,—

"So, Mrs. Hone, you've been forced, I see, to turn your shawl into a blind this fine sunny day; but the sun's off your window now."

"Yes," said Rebecca, pettishly; "but an hour or two ago it was enough to put one's eyes out."

"Well, now, didn't I tell you in the winter how it would be, when you and your sister begged me and husband to have that tree cut down that grew over your window? I wondered, Mrs. Hone, you wanted to get rid of it. I used to think it looked so countrified."

"It was such a stunted shabby thing," cried Rebecca, "and would have made our room as dark and damp as a well, and when the wind was high in the winter, the branches came flapping and flopping against our window of a night enough to scare one. It's a puzzle to me why they didn't crack the glass."

"Well," observed Mrs. Jenkins, civilly, "I am sorry, Miss Rebecca, we have not been lucky enough to please you, and I'm sure——"

Of what at this moment Mrs. Jenkins was sure, Martha never knew; for in order to prevent the little unpleasant contention likely to arise between the landlady and Becky she said,—

"Sister, there's the milkwoman, at last, *low.*" On which Rebecca took a little jug f

the closet by the fire-place, and ran down to get a pennyworth of milk.

"Would it be possible," asked Martha, quickly, "to have an outside awning put over the top of our window like Mr. Polton's down the other side of the way? This room is so much hotter than our sitting-room at our last lodging: but don't say anything, please, about it, to my sister, because if she hears I have asked you, and after all it can't be done, she will be disappointed."

"I am sure, Mrs. Hone, you can't expect we can be at the expense of putting it up, paying such a low rent as you do."

"I am told," said Martha, calmly, "that since so many new streets are finished, we could get rooms quite as good as these at the same rent; but here comes Rebecca, so go now, please, and if you can come up again at half-past seven my sister will be out."

As the landlady went out, Becky came in with a frown on her brow.

"This milk from Butler's," said she, "grows poorer and poorer every day. I've just told the milkwoman that if it stands for a week there won't be a single drop of cream to be seen on it if we put on our spectacles to look for it."

"Well, Becky," said Martha, pleasantly, "you'd better try, and if it is such poor stuff we can but change our milkman. For my part I've thought the milk pretty good lately, and you know I drink much more than you do."

"It's odd, sister, that you *never* agree with me in anything," observed Rebecca, sulkily; "but sickly people, to be sure, can't set up for having

the best palates, and if you're satisfied with sky-blue wash it's all very well, and it does not matter what I drink."

"But it matters to me, dear, that you should have what you like, and be contented. Come, sister, do strive to be more cheerful. Think how much better we are off than hundreds and thousands in this great town. Look round at all the comforts we have in these respectable lodgings, where we can be all to ourselves; and think how few there are in our station who can go to the Bank of England to receive ten pounds every half-year as it comes round."

There was a long silence. Then Martha added, "When I have seen you so dissatisfied lately, Becky, it's made me think whether you wouldn't like better to go out to work by the day than staying here at home. You'd get nicer living in good houses, and have more change, and I'm so much stronger, I'm thankful to say, than I was last year, that I could get on very well without you now."

"It's so hard to get work by the day that's worth the having," said Rebecca fretfully; "and it's never certain too. I might be toiling to death one week, and the next get no good job at all. Then one's no better than a servant so long as one's in those houses, and that goes against the grain with me."

"Well, then, dear Becky, try to make yourself happy with me, and be content at home."

"Upon my word," cried Rebecca impatiently, "one would think I was a little child that required coaxing and petting to make it go."

Because you're such an easy creature yourself, and don't care a pin how things go on, you take it into your head that everybody else is cross and discontented if they only speak a word to complain of things that vex and tease them."

To this unjust and unkind speech Martha made no reply, and the sisters took their tea together without speaking.

An hour after Rebecca went out, and Mrs. Jenkins came up to Martha.

"I've been talking to husband," she began, "and he says he'll do what you want about the window if it can be done cheap; but then he hopes as a set off you'll do something for us."

"What do you mean?" asked Martha; "what do you wish us to do in return?"

"Why you know, Mrs. Hone, when you took our apartments we made a kind of promise we wouldn't take any other lodgers; and I'd scorn to be shabby and do it without your leave and liking; but now I'll tell you how the thing stands. Poor Jenkins, you know, is no chicken, he's full fifteen years older than me, and he's getting very shaky. It's a'most broke my back, Mrs. Hone, the last two months, to hoist him up-stairs of a night, with Sally's help, so the upshot is we're going to turn our back-room on the ground floor into our bedroom. Now, wouldn't it be a pity," she concluded in a wheedling voice, "to leave that handsome front room over this empty?"

Martha looked very grave and said, "A promise is a promise, Mrs. Jenkins, and you lose no rent by changing your rooms."

"But my poor old man's growing a great expense. His appetite's very bad, and he can't eat anything but titbits; and the doctor says I must keep him up with good beer and such things, and so the rent of that room would be a great help to us, Mrs. Hone, if so be you'd be so kind to let us let it."

Martha considered a few moments, and then said, "I cannot give you any answer to this, Mrs. Jenkins, till I have talked it well over with my sister. I wish to be neighbourly and fair and honest with every one, so I will own your rooms suit us very well, and I have no wish to leave you, for you have been civil and obliging, and we should not easily meet with a house so thoroughly clean as yours. Still you can't help seeing that lodgers overhead might spoil all our comfort."

"I'm sure I should be loath to part with you, for as I said to husband just now, I never had lodgers I took to so much, though Miss Becky is now and then a bit of a fidget; but I'd take care to put none but the quietest decentest single women above you; and you know about the tree and all how we have tried to please you; so I feel sure when you've thought it over you'll do the civil thing by us, Mrs. Hone."

"You should not talk so much about that tree, Mrs. Jenkins," said Martha, coolly. "You know very well it was spoiling the front wall of your house, and your husband was glad to cut it down."

This was the simple truth, and the landlady could not deny it, so she only repeated as she *left the room*, "Then you'll think it over, and

let me have your answer, please, as soon as ever you can, for I've a lodger in my eye,—a better-most old widow-lady, who'll be as quiet as a mouse: there's a girl with her who is her niece, but she won't worry you by any noise, for the aunt, I know, keeps her down with a tight hand."

Martha sat thinking what she would do were the decision left to herself. Her landlady's account of her husband's health was quite true, yet Martha could not help fearing that a love of money had been Mrs. Jenkins's strongest inducement to make this attempt to take another lodger.

As to Rebecca, she put herself quite out of temper on hearing the proposal, and found a hundred objections, of which Martha had not thought, to the plan.

At length, however, the promised improvement to their window decided her, and Mrs. Jenkins was informed she might let her upper room to the mouselike widow.

The following day the weather was more sultry than it had been all the season, and Becky declared that the heat, added to the noise going on all day over head, and on the stairs, drove her almost wild.

Mrs. Jenkins, to save the expense of a man's wages, had hired the services of a couple of awkward boys to assist in bringing down the goods from her room.

The thumping, bumping, stamping, and pushing above were something quite wonderful, and the shrill voice of Mrs. Jenkins was heard crying out every moment, "Mind what you're at, Bob, you'll be the ruin of my best bit of furniture."

"Dick, you stupid chap, you're tearing all the new paper off my staircase. Didn't you never handle a bed-post before? Carry it down both upright, can't you?"

Martha was far from well this day, and such a bustle and noise were most unpleasant to her, yet, she said smiling to her sister, "What can't be cured must be endured. This racket will be all over before night, and then we shall enjoy the quiet all the more when it comes."

"Yes, *when* it comes; but won't there be all the bother of white-washing and cleaning before the new lodgers come,—and then the bringing in their goods? If the house is quiet by this day fortnight, we may call ourselves in luck. I'm half afraid, Patty, we've made a poor bargain. The sun would only have tormented us for a few months at a time, but the lodgers may plague us all the year round. As to Mrs. Jenkins's saying she'll give them notice to quit if they annoy us, it's all fiddle-de-dee. Depend upon it, if once she gets people in *she* likes, she won't turn them out again in a hurry just to please us."

"If the worst comes to the worst," remarked Martha calmly, "we can but go ourselves. I don't think you are right, Becky, in speaking so of our landlady. She has never broken her word to us, so we ought to trust her. Besides, it's plain enough to me she is anxious to keep us."

Then looking up cheerfully at her discontented sister she added, "Who knows but this widow may make us a pleasant friendly neighbour, and a child in the house will make it more lively."

Thus in every circumstance of life, whether in trifles or things of moment, did Martha strive to look on the sunny hopeful side of things, while Rebecca, giving way to a thankless gloomy spirit, could see nothing but the dark side of every event.

And what caused this difference between sisters who in natural disposition were much alike ?

Martha had learned to know that there was One who would give her everything that was really best for her, and she felt grateful for every daily comfort He bestowed upon her.

Instead of looking at those better off than herself, and wishing as Rebecca constantly did, for more than God had given her, Martha compared her situation with those worse provided than herself, and said in true humility, I have not deserved the least of all these mercies.

We have spoken of Martha's early disappointment. This she had felt most keenly, and for years the struggle had been hard to submit patiently to the lot appointed for her ; but her prayers for resignation had long ere this been answered, and she now acknowledged that even this her most bitter trial had been sent in mercy.

We do not say Martha was never visited by repining feelings, for who is free from them while on earth ? we only say that when these arose, she prayed for grace to overcome them.

The discontented disposition of Rebecca was a daily sorrow to her sister. It would have been a trial to a worldly-minded person to have lived with her, for what is more wearing to the spirits


and irritating to the temper than a constant succession of gloomy looks and grumbling words? To a Christian like Martha the trial was most painful, for Rebecca's discontent proved she did not look upon her God as a kind and loving Father, nor her Saviour as her friend.

Early one afternoon, about ten days after Mrs. Jenkins had settled herself in the lower part of the house, the widow Mrs. Baisley, and her young niece Eleonora Mercer, arrived to take possession of the upper room.

They were both dressed in mourning made of very coarse materials, which, as Rebecca remarked, did not seem to match with the very neat furniture brought for them to the door in a cart just before their arrival.

"I'm sure," said Becky peeping out of window at Mrs. Baisley, who was overlooking the removal of her goods from the cart, "I'm sure *she'll* be no pleasant neighbour for us, Martha. Why her face is like a man's, and what a size she is! did you ever see such a grenadier of a woman? and just listen what a hoarse croak of a voice she has, too.

"She's not nice-looking, certainly," observed Martha, smiling and holding the curtain a little on one side to look out; "but we don't make our own faces, dear, else we should all be handsome, I suppose. Oh, now I see her full face, I think she is like mother's old friend, Mrs. Gibson. Don't you recollect what an ugly overgrown woman she was, yet what a good kind-hearted creature? Oh, there's the niece. As well as I can see from here, she is pretty enough to please



you, though she is pale and thin. Poor thing, I suppose from her mourning she must have lost some near relation lately."

"How queerly she is dressed!" said Becky. "And I wonder why her hair is clipt in that fashion?"

With the help of a carpenter who came with the goods, Mrs. Baisley soon arranged her room, and the Hones saw little of their fellow-lodgers till the evening of the following day.

About eight o'clock a light step was then heard going softly down the narrow stairs, and after a few minutes the same step was heard coming up again. The rattle of a tin made the sisters conclude the step was that of the widow's niece, who was bringing up water. Just as she reached the Hones' door, her foot tripped, and she fell heavily on the landing-place, the can she had held in her hand striking against the balusters with a loud noise.

Both sisters instantly rushed out, raised up the child, and took her into their room before Mrs. Baisley could run down, and Mrs. Jenkins run up to know what was the matter.

The young girl was only a little bruised ; but it was very painful to Martha to see Mrs. Baisley as soon as she appeared shake her niece by the shoulder, and scold her in the harshest manner for her carelessness and awkwardness.

"Oh, don't be so angry with her," cried the gentle Martha, "I am sure she could not help the accident. The staircase is so dark just at the turning, and the place was all new to her."

"Look here," said Rebecca, holding up a re-

of worsted, "ten to one it was this that threw her down. I must have dropped it on the stairs."

"Oh, yes, indeed," exclaimed the girl in a timid voice, "I felt my foot slip all of a sudden on something round."

"If you had been walking steadily, Nelly, as I always desire you to do, such a little thing as a reel would not have thrown you down," said the widow sternly.

"Indeed, Mrs. Baisley," interposed Martha, "I happened to notice to my sister how quietly your niece went down past our door."

Here the landlady who had been wiping up the water spilt on the landing, came in looking very cross, and Mrs. Baisley, giving her niece a push towards her, said, "Beg Mrs. Jenkins's pardon for the mischief you have done, and the trouble you have given her."

The girl did as she was desired in a manner so humble, that it melted away Mrs. Jenkins's ill-humour, and patting Nelly on the back, she said, "Don't look so frightened, child, there's no great harm done. The water was clean and won't spoil my carpet, and the wiping it up was no great trouble."

"You are all much too kind to such a careless tiresome girl," cried the widow, "and I am very sorry this should have happened to disturb you so. Now, Nelly, make your curtesy, and let us go."

The aunt and niece retired, but Mrs. Jenkins stood as if about to speak, when Sally, the young maid-of-all-work, came up to the door to tell her *mistress* she was wanted below.

"Well, Martha," began Rebecca, as soon as Mrs. Jenkins disappeared, "what do you think of our new lodger *now*? A nice friendly cheerful sort of neighbour the widow is likely to make us, isn't she? It was a queer first meeting, I must say."

"They are not likely to be noisy people," observed Martha gently, "and that was what you were most afraid of. Though the aunt was very angry she did not speak loud, and it's plain the girl is kept in order."

"In order! yes indeed, she looked scared out of her senses. I can't think that aunt of hers can have a bit of feeling in her to scold the poor child as she did before us strangers, and all for an accident. How I longed to tell her my mind!"

"That would have done no good," said her sister.

"I'm sure, Patty, it will worry me to death to think what cruelty may be going on above stairs, though that cross aunt may keep all still enough for us not to hear her."

"Oh, Becky, how can you fancy such horrid things! We don't know anything yet about these people. Perhaps the girl, though she looks so timid and mild, requires sharp training. And if the aunt should be as cross as she looks, who knows but that by-and-by we may be able to show the poor child a little kindness, and make her life more happy."

"Take my word for it," said Rebecca quickly, "the old one will never let us meddle with the girl. I can tell by her eye she's as proud as proud can be."

"Wait a little and we shall see," said Martha.



CHAPTER II.

THE following morning soon after eight, Mrs. Baisley, dressed in better black than that she had before been seen to wear, left the house, and immediately after the landlady paid the Hones a visit, and gave Rebecca the information she was curious to know.

"The new lodgers have not disturbed you, I hope," began Mrs. Jenkins. "Mrs. Baisley is just off for the day. She has got a place as helping teacher at a sort of School of Correction set up by some ladies in the city. She's to go three times a week, from nine to five on the *days the ladies won't be there*. I dare say the

widow's a rare good mistress for them kind of little vagabond children that must be kept down tight. It's a shame they don't pay her better for such work, though."

"Does the niece do nothing," asked Martha, "to help to support herself?"

"Yes, Mrs. Baisley tells me she keeps her close to fancy knitting and netting, and the ladies that have the school sells the things she makes to their grand friends. The widow is one of your close ones, and ten to one I should not have got this out of her if I hadn't said I must know what she had coming in to pay her rent before I let her my room."

"We didn't like her behaviour to her niece at all last night," observed Rebecca. "Is the poor child an orphan?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. It won't do to be putting of questions to shy folks who would be like to say, 'What's that to you?' We shall find out in good time, Miss Becky, I've no doubt. But to talk of other matters, pray how does the window suit you, Miss Hone?"

"It can't do better, thank you," replied Martha pleasantly. "You see we fasten up that piece of baize from the woodwork in front, and then with the window wide open we get all the air without the sun."

"There's nothing like having one's wits about one," cried the thrifty landlady. "I picked up that blind-top second-hand at a broker's for a quarter its worth."

"Oh then," said Becky sharply, "you ought to paint it fresh for us, it wants it bad enough."

"I'll see about that some day," rejoined Mrs Jenkins laughing, "that's to say when you've nothing else to peck holes in, Miss."

"I suppose," inquired Martha, "you think sister and I had better not take any notice of our fellow lodgers at present."

"No, it won't do. Sally overheard Mrs Baisley telling the girl to keep to herself, and not to stir till she came home."

The widow Baisley's room was in neat order. Nelly's bed-clothes were all folded up and put under the sofa on which she slept; the aunt's small bedstead turned up and looking like a good chest of drawers; a new piece of coloured oil-cloth covered the work-table which stood in the window, and a mahogany book-case filled up the space between the fire-place and the wall.

By the table sat Nelly, dressed in a black stuff frock, with a clean pinafore of lilac print over it. Her glossy brown hair cut short like a boy's was combed straight above her brows. Her hands and nails beautifully clean, proved what attention her strict aunt made her niece pay to cleanliness. As Mrs. Hone had remarked, Nelly's features were pretty, but her appearance on the whole was not pleasing. She looked dispirited, discontented, rather sickly, and younger than her years. She was not now at her knitting but learning a chapter in the Bible by heart which her aunt had set her.

The chapter was a very difficult one for a girl to commit to memory, who, until the last eighteen months had been made to apply very little to books. It was the more difficult this morning

because Nelly, being alone, was tempted with the natural curiosity of childhood to peep out of window every now and then into a street that was quite new to her.

"Oh dear, dear!" sighed poor Nelly, "I shall never be able to get it all by heart;" and again and again she read over the verses, of which she did not understand the sense.

Mrs. Jenkins's tall old clock, which stood in the passage by the parlour door, struck ten before Nelly felt certain she could repeat the chapter as perfectly as her aunt always expected her to do; then, quite wearied with the mental effort, she carefully put away her book, and gladly took up her knitting needles.

As her nimble, slender fingers formed row after row of stitches, as even as pins in paper, her mind went back to the last evening, and to Martha Hone's kind looks and still kinder words.

"How good she was to me!" said Nelly to herself. "She seemed so afraid I was hurt, and she took my part so kindly. How I wish aunt was but like her! I'm very glad we've come away from that dirty, dark court in the City, to live in a house where there's such nice people. The little servant-girl, too, looks very good-natured. I wonder if she'll often come up to the garret behind, where I know she sleeps. Tiresome, cross old aunt, Idaresay, will tell me never to talk to Sally; but I shan't mind that when she's out at the School. It's very bad the way she treats me. Poor father never thought she'd use me so when he asked her to look after me. She has spited and vexed me in everything she

THE LODGERS.

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could, ever since father died. Didn't she cut off all my pretty long curls, and make my head look like those horrid men I saw at the prison Uncle Baisley took me to see, one day? Doesn't she dress me up in nothing but her shabby old clothes? I shouldn't mind *that* so much, if she didn't make them such a shape that I'm ashamed to be seen out of doors in them. It isn't as if I'd always been a poor beggarly girl. How well I remember the pretty white frocks and trowsers all with frills I used to wear when I was little, and a coral necklace, and a silk bonnet; and when strangers came to the town, they used to take me for a little lady, and ask whose child I was. And now I can't think what people can take me for: I'm sure I'm not half so smart as the maid-of-all-work below. Poor father *did* tell me, I know, before he died, never to dress beyond my station; but I'm quite certain he would never have liked to see me look like a scarecrow, and that's what I do now. Then she will call me Nelly, when my name's Eleonora Matilda, and father always called me Elinor."

We do not know how long the young knitter would have gone on in this strain, had she not come to a part of her pattern which required all her attention, and made her forget her aunt, and all other causes of vexation. One o'clock struck, and Nelly felt very hungry, having breakfasted at seven.

She was right glad to look into the cupboard for the portion of bread and butter her aunt had left for her. It was but a very scanty dinner for a growing girl, and Nelly as she ate it,

could not help recollecting with regret, the plentiful meals of meat and pudding which had always been provided for her in her father's lifetime.

She did not, however, think of reproaching her aunt with unkindness, for not feeding her better. She knew perfectly well that Mrs. Baisley was very poor, and could not deny that her aunt gave her rather more food than she ever kept for herself.

As there was no cloth to remove, nor plates, and knives and forks, Nelly was soon busy at work again, and getting on rapidly, when, by ill luck, a man with one of those large organs, with moving figures over them, came down the street, and stopt, and began to play just before the house next to Mrs. Jenkins, where some children were in the small garden in front of the parlour window.

Nelly had a good ear, and a great love of music, the temptation was too strong to be resisted. She threw down her work on the table, opened wide the window, and leaning out, watched the movement of the gay-painted puppets, and listened with delight to the merry tunes played by the organ.

The man went through all the set on his barrel, and when he ended, pence were given to him by the children next door. He was then moving on, when a sweet little girl in the arms of an elder sister, about Nelly's age, called out, in baby language, "Oh, Danny, don't let the pretty dollies do ; tell the man to mate the dollies dance adain."

The Granny, who was standing at the window, could not refuse the request of her youngest and pet grandchild, and the organ-man remained playing for the children nearly another half hour. Nelly remarked, with a feeling of envy, how the elder sister kissed the little one, when the music was over, and how the little one returned the kiss, and put her fat-dimpled arms round the big one's neck, while she carried her towards the window where the grandmother stood.

"I've no dear little sisters to love," sighed poor Nelly. "What a darling that is! I wish I'd some one to love me like that eldest girl. How happy they all look there together, and I've nobody to play with me, nor to be with me."

All this lost Nelly a whole hour's work; but we must not be too severe on the child for her idleness, seeing she had been at work so long in perfect solitude.

The last sounds of the organ at the end of the street had died away. The merry young ones next door had all been called into their granny's house, to feast on cakes and fruit, in honour of the pet's birthday, and the poor lonely Nelly snatched up her knitting, to try to make up for wasted time, by double industry. Alas! all in vain. Five o'clock was almost come, and Nelly saw plainly her task would not be completed.

Frightened and anxious, her fingers seemed to lose their power of moving rapidly, and she sat dreading to hear her aunt's footsteps on the stairs.

The task of knitting given to Nelly this day was longer than usual, Mrs. Baisley having pro-

mised the lady for whom Nelly was working, that her orders would be ready in a week.

The aunt came in, pale, tired, and cross. The afternoon had been hot, the schoolroom close, and some of the children very rebellious.

"Our kettle is boiling in the kitchen," said Mrs. Baisley; "run down with the tea and tea-pot, child, while I set the tea-things; my throat is quite dry with thirst."

Nelly hastened to the kitchen, glad to escape out of Mrs. Baisley's presence, even for a few minutes. Sally saw she looked very sad, and good-naturedly asked what was the matter; and whether she could do anything to help her.

"Oh, no, thank you," said Nelly, the tears rising in her eyes, "nobody can help me."

While Nelly was absent, Mrs. Baisley measured her work, and found an inch or two wanting of the length set her to do.

"How's this, child?" said Mrs. Baisley, in her sternest tone. "What's the reason you have not done your task to-day?"

Nelly coloured crimson, but gave no answer. She dared not tell in what way she had wasted her time.

"Well, if you can make no good excuse for your laziness, girl," continued the widow, looking still blacker, "you may take that crust of dry bread and a glass of water for your supper, for not a cup of tea, nor a morsel of butter, shall you taste to-night. If you don't choose to work for your own living, you need not expect I shall toil to find you in dainties. Now mind what I say, *you shan't have your evening walk, and you shan't*

go to bed, till four more inches of your knitting is finished. No, not if you sit up till midnight."

Nelly began to cry, and sobbed so loud, that her aunt threatened to box her ears if she did not cease making a noise, that might disturb the Hones.

Was the young girl crying for sorrow for her little fault, or for having displeased her aunt? No, for neither. Her tears arose from anger, vexation, and weariness. Alas! poor child, she had not yet learned to act in any way from right principle.

After her tea, Mrs. Baisley put on her bonnet, and taking a small market-basket with her, left Nelly alone; and shortly after Sally the maid came up, to bring a pocket handkerchief, which she said Nelly had dropt in the kitchen when she came to fill the tea-pot.

"I knew it was yours," Sally began, "'cause I saw you take hold of the kettle with it."

"I thank you," said Nelly, just looking up for a moment from her work, to take the handkerchief. "Aunt would have been *so* angry with me, if it had been lost. Do you know where she's gone out to this evening, and how long she'll be gone?"

The familiar manner in which Nelly said this, put Sally quite at her ease, and she answered in as free a way,—

"Oh yes, missis and her are gone down to a cheap shop two or three streets off, and they won't be back for half an hour or more. They've gone after salt butter that's to be had at that *there* shop, three farthings a pound cheaper than

anywhere else. Misses wouldn't mind walking a couple of miles to save a farthing any day. She's what father calls a skinflint."

"What's that?" asked Nelly, half smiling at the word which sounded strange and ridiculous to her ears.

"Why, don't you know that, Miss? Why, it's somebody that scrapes up all they can, and screws, and saves, and can't bear to order a scrap more than she can help into the pantry."

"And what sort of a man is your master?"

"He's as deaf as a post, and has got a lame leg. I've nothing to do with him. Misses looks after him herself, and does everything for him."

"Then you've not got a very comfortable place here, Sally?"

"No, I don't like it much; but mother says missis will be the making of me for a right good servant; and father says I must stay out my two years, and then they'll try hard to get me a genteel place, but I don't think as how I *could* stay, if it wasn't for Mrs. Hone."

"What does she do for you?"

"Oh, she can't do much; but she talks so nice, and teaches me on Sundays sometimes; and mother says to me, says she,—Mind, Sally, you learn all as ever you can from the lodgers, as well as your missis,—and so you know I'm trying, and Mrs. Hone often calls me a quick, handy girl, and missis has left off a scolding of me, and worretting, as she was used to; and now father's in good wages again, you know, and mother's got a mangle. She often sends me a big pudding, and a hunch of cake, and that

fills up when I've got only a few scraps for supper. I takes good care," continued Sally, with a vulgar grin, "that Skinflint doesn't set eyes on the pudding, else may be she'd cut me off at dinner."

"What a shabby, mean old woman she must be!" exclaimed Nelly; "and she can't be poor neither, with all these nice lodgings to let."

"Poor! Not a bit of it. The two next houses are master's as well as this, and they've been let ever since I've been servant here, and that's a year and a half come August; but if she'd the whole street from end to end, she'd still be a skinflint."

"Do you often come up to your bedroom, Sally? I'm very dull all by myself. The days aunt is out, do come up to see me, whenever you can."

"I can't come when missis is in. She'd make a fine to do, if she caught me out of my kitchen in the day-time; but I'll slip up when I can. Your aunt's horrid cross to you, ain't she?"

"Yes, very cross indeed."

"Why does she keep you moping up here to-night, instead of taking you out a bit shopping this fine evening?"

Mrs. Baisley's niece now told all her grievances to Sally, and saw that she pitied her very much. This naturally made Nelly still more inclined to be friends with the maid of-all-work.

"Have you no father nor mother?" inquired Sally.

"My father is dead, and my mother," said

Nelly, looking red, and confused, "does not care for me, so I have nobody but aunt. I've a brother a great deal older than I am, but he's gone away over the seas, and aunt hasn't heard of him a long time. I'm glad we've come from the city here, Sally. We used to live in a dark tumble-down room, over a warehouse, and I'd nobody to talk to there, but an old woman, as deaf as your master, and she was as cross as two sticks, and sometimes wouldn't speak for days. She was aunt's friend, and *hated* me." Nelly paused a moment, and then added, "Do you think Mrs. Hone will ever take notice of me, Sally?"

"I'll be bound to say she will if your old cross patch aunt will let her. I've heard her say she's uncommon fond of young people, and I daresay she'll try."

Here the tinkling sound of a little hand-bell interrupted Sally in the middle of her speech, and crying out "That's master a ringing," she hurried down stairs, leaving the little knitter in better spirits than she found her.

It pleased Nelly greatly to find that Sally was as good-natured as she looked, and the sympathy she had expressed for her hard lot made Nelly already look upon her as a real friend.

In spite of all the good lessons Nelly had committed to memory, such as "The Lord abhorreth the deceitful man," and "My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit," in spite, *I repeat*, of these lessons, Nelly never gave it a thought that in asking Sally to visit her in underhand a manner, she was deceiving her.

breaking God's law, and leading another to join her in the sin.

The lessons she had been taught filled her head, but had never reached her heart.

The following day passed somewhat differently from the one we have described. Mrs. Baisley being at home, heard Nelly read aloud for some time, and gave her a lesson in writing and arithmetic.

Fearful of punishment the young girl did her very best, but no kind word, no look of encouragement was bestowed upon her.

Mrs. Baisley had a strong conviction that all praise was very hurtful to young persons in general. In Nelly's case there was also a prejudice in the aunt's mind, which prevented her from ever seeing that her niece deserved commendation.

We own Nelly had many faults, partly the result of early mismanagement: but these faults were magnified greatly to Mrs. Baisley by prejudice. She saw nothing in her niece but an idle, thoughtless, ill-disposed girl, whom it was her bounden duty to rule with an iron hand, and who could be ruled by no other means. Yet Mrs. Baisley could not deny at this time that Nelly in some respects was improved, and that months of stern discipline had overcome the girl's slothful habits and tendency to disobedience.

It may be well here to give a short history of Nelly's early childhood, and to explain why Mrs. Baisley felt so little love for the daughter of her *only* brother.

Mr. Mercer, Eleonora's father, was a respectable small shop-keeper, in a rising town in the West of England. He married very early in life a pious and industrious young woman, who made him a most happy home. They had but one son, a fine child, and promising in most respects, though of a violent temper.

For some years, greatly owing to Mrs. Mercer's intelligence, attention, and civility in the shop, her husband's business went on most prosperously, and Mercer began to be considered as a clever tradesman, who year by year was adding to the little capital his father had left him.

At this time Mrs. Baisley was married and settled near her brother, and having no children of her own became exceedingly fond of John Mercer. Few days passed without her seeing him and his good mother.

When the boy was nearly nine years of age, and under his mother's excellent training was improving daily, that mother was suddenly snatched away from him by a bad fever, which was very fatal to many persons in the neighbourhood.

She died in peace, trusting in that Saviour whom she had loved and served from her youth. A few hours before she breathed her last she took leave of her sister-in-law, and in a most affecting manner recommended her young son to her care.

The grief of Mr. Mercer for a time was not to be told. He could attend to no business, and could scarcely bear the sight of his motherless child; and, but for the exertions of Mrs. Baisley,

the custom of the shop would have been half ruined.

Passionate sorrow is seldom very lasting in a person of weak character, and in less than a year, against the advice and entreaties of Mrs. Baisley, the widower took for his second wife a young woman the very reverse of his first.

From that day all went wrong with Robert Mercer. His pretty vain wife, instead of assisting in the shop, spent all her time in visiting and gossiping. Her dress was more fit for a Baronet's lady than for the wife of a petty shop-keeper, and her extravagance in the house was ruinous.

For a few years she behaved with tolerable kindness to her step-son, but when her only daughter grew a pretty child, she began to neglect the boy and bestow all her love on the girl. And worse than this, she afterwards gave way to such wicked jealousy that she could scarcely endure to see her husband show affection to his only son.

If there were one person in the world whom Mrs. Mercer detested it was her husband's sister, and whenever they met bitter words were sure to pass between them, one great source of contention being poor John.

Every month seemed to add to the ill-will the sisters bore each other.

In all this domestic misery, perhaps the boy was one of the greatest sufferers. His high spirit *could not brook the treatment he was subjected to at home.* His temper was becoming as violent *as ever*, and Mr. Baisley, who had been a sailor,

strongly advised Mr. Mercer to save the lad from ruin, by sending him off in a Merchantman to sea.

John was most willing to go. He had always a wish to travel in foreign countries, and his uncle's stories had fostered his desire to see the wonders of the world.

For the first time in her life Mrs. Baisley now strongly opposed the opinion of her husband, and thus was domestic discord spread in a second family.

The aunt had always hoped her nephew would succeed to his grandfather's and father's business, and settle in the place where she and her brother had been born and bred; and now that nephew was to be sent far from her, to seek an uncertain livelihood, her disappointment was bitter indeed.

Much blame deservedly fell on Mr. Mercer, but far more on his wife, and many a one in the town agreed with Mrs. Baisley, that it was an abominable shame the poor lad should be thus driven out of his father's home, and from a thriving business, and the money John's own excellent mother had been the means of getting be spent upon a worthless woman and her spoilt child.

Eleonora Matilda, for thus had the foolish mother named her girl, was truly a spoilt child, indulged from infancy in every whim. She was allowed, nay even encouraged by her mother to behave *in a most improper way* to Mrs. Baisley, *therefore it is not surprising that the aunt did not learn to love her.* Next to the pleasure of de

ing herself out in foolish finery, Mrs. Mercer took pleasure in dressing her little child. Eleonora's hair was always cut and curled in the same fashion as that of the young daughters of the gentry of the neighbourhood, and her dress was of the same materials as theirs, and fashionably made.

All this rendered Mr. Mercer truly unhappy. He knew and felt how sinful it was to permit such false indulgence, vanity, waste, and extravagance, but he had given the reins out of his own hands, and now he had not the resolution or power to curb his wilful wife.

He therefore gave himself up with double diligence to his business, in order to forget his troubles and to furnish the means to pay his way. At length over exertion and anxiety began to undermine his health. His wife, who hated the sight of sickness and suffering, began to neglect her home more than ever, and even appeared to care no longer for her only child.

She formed a new acquaintance with some people of very bad reputation, and late one evening left her husband, never to return to him again.

Poor Mr. Mercer, enfeebled as he was, never recovered this shock. His sister, now a widow, came to nurse him through his painful illness, and take care of his house. His business, left to a foreman, dwindled away to nothing, so that when on his death everything was sold, and the debts paid, Mercer's children were left beggars.

When all affairs were settled, Mrs. Baisley,

with some money of her own in her pocket, came up with her niece to London. She could not endure to remain in her native place, where her sister-in-law had brought ruin and disgrace on a family hitherto respectable, and she told only one friend where in town she intended to reside.

Unfortunately Eleonora was in person extremely like her wretched mother, and her aunt was thus daily reminded of one whom she wished to forget for ever.

We fear this resemblance helped to persuade Mrs. Baisley that poor Nelly had all the bad qualities of her parent, yet the aunt had no idea how unjustly she was influenced by this circumstance. She really desired to do her duty by her niece, and to keep the promise she had made her brother to bring up Nelly as her own child.

We doubt whether she could have treated a child of her own (however unamiable) as she treated Elinor.

Nelly had been affectionately attached to her father, and had felt more than children of her age usually would have felt, at the wicked conduct of her mother; not that she saw its dreadful sinfulness, but because she perceived how it had destroyed her father's health and happiness.

Now at the age of thirteen, being more aware of the disgrace of having such a mother, she could not bear to speak of her, and there was no punishment which tried her feelings so much as her aunt's frequent speech—"Ah! I always expect you will turn out just like your wicked mother."



CHAPTER III.

SOME weeks passed over the lodgers at Mrs. Jenkins's, and little change took place among them. Mrs. Baisley keeping aloof from the Hones, Martha had no opportunity of seeing more of Nelly, than just meeting her on the stairs and speaking a few kind words, but on the days Mrs. Baisley was out, Mrs. Hone's thoughts were frequently turned to the solitary child sitting above stairs.

Sally contrived, whenever she was able, to steal quietly up to Nelly, though she knew this was against Mrs. Baisley's wish, and that of her mistress. She took care always to pass the door

of the Hones on tip-toe, for she knew she was doing what Martha would think very wrong, and she was more afraid and ashamed of Mrs. Hone's knowing than any one else, how she was disobeying and deceiving her mistress. Yet for all this the young servant quieted her conscience by saying her tiresome old mistress and Nelly's hard-hearted aunt deserved to be cheated, and where could be the harm of a bit of talk.

These stolen visits were hurtful in more ways than one to Nelly. The maid-of-all-work had been brought up in a low neighbourhood of London, and had seen and known people of a very different description from those among whom Nelly had passed her childhood.

The conversation of Sally, and the idle gossiping tales she told, were anything but improving to the country girl. Sometimes, indeed, Nelly felt half ashamed to listen to Sally's stories, for with all her faults she was neither a bold nor a vulgar child, but the lonely life she led, made her glad to have *any* companion, and Sally's good-nature and sympathy made Nelly forget she was low.

Another thing which added to their friendship, was the pleasure Sally felt in saving for Nelly some of the eatables sent to her by her mother, and Nelly's gratitude in receiving what appeared to her now (stinted as she was in food) like real dainties.

One afternoon, as Mrs. Baisley was coming home from the city an hour earlier than she was *in the habit of doing*, she saw Nelly leaning out of the window, and shaking her handkerchief, and *smiling*, as her aunt supposed, at a rude boy.

girl, who were looking up at the window laughing and making faces.

Mrs. Baisley knew these two young people well by sight, and had by chance heard a person in a chandler's shop say that they belonged to a family of very bad character. The boy was spoken of as one of the worst lads in the street where Mrs. Jenkins lived.

In great anger Mrs. Baisley entered her lodgings ; but she mounted the stairs with as light a step as possible, that she might not be heard coming up, and be able to seize on Nelly at the open window.

She succeeded in doing so ; and the girl's deep blushes and confusion proving her guilt, in her aunt's opinion, she hastily pulled down the window, and, before asking one question, gave poor Nelly some violent boxes on the ears, saying sternly, "There, take that, and that, you impudent girl. It's better I should chastise you well now, than let you grow up a disgrace to your sex, and copy your wicked mother's ways."

Nelly's heart was ready to burst ; tears rushed down her face—tears from fright, shame, and pain ; and she had difficulty in restraining her sobs.

For half-an-hour neither aunt nor niece spoke. Then Mrs. Baisley said,—

"Nelly, you had better, for your own sake, tell me the truth at once ; but, if you don't, I shall find it out some other way. How often *have you been leaning out of window, as you did just now, to disgrace yourself by laughing with young vagabonds in the streets ?*"

"I never, never did it before, Aunt," said Nelly, still crying piteously; "and I'll never do it again, if you won't talk about mother. I know Sally's a common sort of girl; but I didn't think you'd call her a vagabond. I didn't think it was so shameful to laugh at *her* out of window; indeed, indeed, I didn't."

There was something so honest in Nelly's voice and whole manner that it struck Mrs. Baisley. She could not doubt she was speaking the truth; and she began half to repent of the blows she had given her.

"Was it *only* Sally you were laughing at, child? And how came it I never saw her in the street?" said Mrs. Baisley more calmly.

"I don't know," answered Nelly. "I saw her go round the corner of Mrs. Reeve's next door, a minute or two before you came and caught me at the window."

"And you saw no rude young people looking up at you, and making faces from the other side of the street?"

"No," said Nelly simply; "I saw nobody but Sally."

Mrs. Baisley went down instantly to her landlady, and found that Sally had been out on errands, and had returned just about half-an-hour, and had come in by the back-door, as Nelly had said, round the corner, where there was an entrance to the back of the houses in the street.

Though the aunt felt sorrow for her unjust severity, she expressed none when she returned to Nelly. She only said,—

"I see well enough, child, that in spite of all I have told you, you must have made yourself freer than you ought with Sally. She wouldn't else have dared to take such liberties with you. Now, look to it, Nelly; if I find you encourage her to talk with you, and to come up here when I'm not at home, you will repent it before long."

Mrs. Baisley then took a hammer and nails, and fastened the lower part of the window down, so that the sash could only open from the top; and, in the evening, she covered the panes of glass with whitening, thus making her room more like a prison than ever to her young niece.

For a week or two Nelly would not allow Sally to stay when she came to see her, though she still accepted from her a bit of pudding or cake now and then. She was one evening, when Mrs. Baisley was out, just eating a bit of gingerbread thus obtained, when she heard her aunt's voice down stairs. A drawer near her was open, where were kept her own clothes; and in great fear, hastily wrapping the gingerbread in the bit of newspaper in which Sally had brought it, she thrust it into a shawl in the corner of this drawer.

It happened that very night, when Nelly was in bed and asleep, that her aunt took it into her head to examine Nelly's drawer. All was neat and tidy except the shawl, which was rolled up in a bundle at one end. Mrs. Baisley took it up *to see if it were not tumbled, and out fell the newspaper with its contents upon the floor.*

It was long before Mrs. Baisley could sleep

that night from vexation. The moment Nelly awoke in the morning, she accused her of deceit and dishonesty, and commanded her to confess how the cake had come into her possession.

Nelly declared solemnly the cake had been given to her ; but no threats could induce her to own by whom, and her aunt knew not what to think.

After breakfast the widow went down to Mrs. Jenkins, to inquire if she knew anything about the matter. The landlady said she did not ; and called her young servant, who also declared Nelly had never left the house to buy anything, when Mrs. Baisley was absent.

"I shouldn't at all wonder if the Hones gave her the gingerbread," said Mrs. Jenkins ; "but why in the world the girl doesn't say so, I can't think."

Mrs. Baisley then went to the Hones, and was received by Martha in the kindest manner. The sisters, of course, said they had given Nelly nothing ; but, on hearing the story, Rebecca exclaimed, "I remember meeting Sally on the stairs yesterday evening, with something in her hand wrapt in a newspaper ; and I fancied I saw her whip it under her apron as she passed me. Sally's very like to have bought your niece cake, if she asked her."

"Nelly never has a penny of her own to spend," observed the widow, looking very uneasy.

"Will you let me send for Sally ?" asked Mrs. Hone, "and hear me question her before you perhaps she will tell the truth to me."

Sally came, and Martha thus addressed her :

"I have lately been talking to you, Sally, about always speaking the truth ; and it was only last Sunday I showed you from the Bible that God will punish liars. Now, Sally, I quite believe that you *did* give Mrs. Baisley's niece something to eat last night. I think, too, you say you don't know anything about this, because you are afraid of getting her into disgrace. You will bring much more trouble upon her, child, by not telling truth. Remember, Sally, there is One who sees into your heart this moment, and is watching to see whether you will say what is true."

The little servant grew as red as fire. She hesitated for a moment ; then, taking courage, she raised her eyes to Mrs. Hone, and said, "You're right, Ma'am ; I did give it her."

"And who gave it to you, Sally ?"

"I got it from home, Ma'am ; but I didn't say so, because I didn't want missis to know that mother sent me victuals on the sly."

"And, pray," asked Mrs. Baisley, fixing her dark, stern eyes on Sally, "what business had you with my niece ? and how dared you go into *my* room without my leave ?"

Sally stammered out, "I didn't do no harm there, Ma'am."

"Have you often been to see my niece ?"

The girl had No ready on her tongue ; but she saw Martha's earnest look, and she answered, "Yes, but not the last week or two ; *Miss Nelly* wouldn't let me come to stay with *her*."

"You may go, Sally," said Mrs. Hone. "Some day I'll talk more to you about all this."

When the maid left the room, Mrs. Baisley asked the sisters if they were satisfied that Sally had spoken the truth. They both said they were, and Rebecca added,—

"You know our landlady isn't one to cram a servant ; so Sally's mother, I dare say, often does send her things to eat."

The widow rose to depart, when Martha, in a most friendly manner, begged her to stay a few minutes longer, and began,—

"Mrs. Baisley, I hope you won't take amiss what I am going to say, nor think I'm a busy-body who wants to meddle with my neighbours, if I ask you to let your niece bring her work down here, and sit with us part of the days you are out. You have been long enough in the house with sister and me," she added, with a pleasant smile, "to know what kind of folks we are, and our ways of going on ; and, if you wish to know more, you are quite welcome to ask Mrs. Jenkins any questions you like about us."

"I'm sure it's very civil of you to make the offer," observed the widow gravely ; "but I don't like to burden strangers with looking after a girl like Nelly, when I've no means in my power to make them a return for their trouble."

"What trouble could it be ?" asked Martha, kindly. "It's not as if your niece were a little child of five or six ; and, as to making a return, I'm sure Rebecca will tell you we shall think ourselves well paid, if we can be of any use, poor young motherless girl, and keep her

being tempted to keep such low company as Sally's."

"You're very good, Ma'am ; but, as to that, Mrs. Jenkins and me together will find ways and means to keep a sharp look-out upon both the girls in future ; and Nelly must have a longer head than I give her credit for, if ever she gets that Sally up into *my* room again."

"But," argued Martha, in a tone of pity, "is it not a sad, dull life for a girl so young, to spend so many hours alone in the week ? Do pray, Mrs. Baisley, let her come to us now and then. We are so fond of children ! and never see any but Mrs. Reeve's grandchildren next door, and them but seldom."

The idea of Nelly's sad, dull life, had not often crossed Mrs. Baisley's mind ; and when it did, she said to herself, "Loneliness is better than bad company, and I don't know anybody to let her be with."

Martha's speech touched her a little, and she replied :—

"Well, if you put it in that way, and really like children about you, I can't refuse ; but I'm sure, Mrs. Hone, you'll agree with me, that it won't do to let Nelly come at present. To my mind, that would just be rewarding her for her deceit and disobedience about Sally."

"When you please," said Martha, who saw she should gain nothing by urging the point further ; "and, to set your mind at ease, my sister or I will always let you know in the morning when it is not convenient to have *Sally*."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hone," said the widow, rising. "You are very good. I only wish she was a girl to deserve your kindness better."

So saying, she bade the sisters good-day.

It was a great relief to Mrs. Baisley's mind, to find that Nelly had not been guilty of dishonesty; but she still felt it her duty to reprimand and chastise her for her disobedience, in encouraging Sally. A diet of bread and water was enjoined for a week; and, during that time, Mrs. Baisley never spoke to her niece but when obliged.

And what effect had this punishment on the heart of Nelly? None that was good. It only added to the more than dislike she already felt towards her stern relation, and raised an evil wish to deceive again, could she do so without fear of detection. There was one thing which gave her far more pain than her own punishment,—it was the fear that the good-natured Sally might have got into trouble with her mistress, from her kindness and generosity to herself.

This she had no means of finding out, as Sally was forbidden to go to the upper floor when Mrs. Baisley was away, and Nelly was also forbidden the kitchen.

We now return to the Hones.

"Well, I am so glad," exclaimed Martha, her pleasing face bright with benevolent pleasure; "I am so glad we've got our wish at last, Becky."

No benevolent countenance was turned to hers, for Rebecca looked up discontentedly, and said:—

"Our wish!—you ought to say, *my* wish, I think, for you've been and settled it all your own way, without saying a word to me."

"Oh, Rebecca!" cried Martha, much hurt and disappointed; "haven't you been pitying that poor lonely child over and over again ever since she came into the lodging, and saying almost every day how you longed to get her out of jail, as you called it? What can have made you change so all of a sudden? I'm quite sure I thought I was pleasing you just as much as myself in what I have done."

"I didn't fancy her such a sly girl," said Becky, half sulkily. "It's clear there's no trusting her, and it will be anything but a pleasant piece of business to have to watch her, if she's such an artful puss. Why, she'll be prying and spying, perhaps, into all our concerns, and we sha'n't dare to open our mouths to one another before her."

"Dear Becky," observed Martha, mildly, "you don't consider the temptation this poor girl has had to deceive. I'm afraid if you and I had been shut up and treated at her age as she has been, we should have done quite as wrong. She won't be tempted with us. Oh, don't let us be selfish! Remember, dear, so poor as we are, how seldom we have an opportunity of doing good to a fellow-creature; and it does seem to me as if Nelly had been sent here on purpose; and if there's anything in her ways that worries you, dear, I can but ask Mrs. Baisley, by-and-by, to let me go up to Nelly, instead of her coming down to us."

"And leave me to mope by myself!" cried the unamiable Rebecca.

A warm colour for a moment mounted into Martha's cheeks, and, with slight anger, she exclaimed,—

"Shall I never be able to do anything to please you, Rebecca? I really believe the more I strive to do it, and give up to you, the more discontented you are."

No words more true than these were ever spoken.

"Then you'd better leave it alone, and always have your own way, without more ado," said the provoking Becky; and, after a pause, she added,—"Of course you've a right to invite any body *you* choose into these lodgings, for they are yours, and not mine. I've no money in the Bank to pay for them, as you have, you know."

Tears filled Martha's eyes, and she said, in a tone of mild reproach,—

"How can you say such unkind things, Becky? When have I ever grudged you anything I had to give? Hav'n't I always said half of all I have is yours?"

She stopped, and wiped her eyes; then added, in a firm voice,—

"Now, we won't talk any more of this; for you see, dear, the thing is all settled, and must be; and if I could alter it, I would not; and you know very well why it would be wrong to do so."

Rebecca was silent for some time, while a struggle was going on within. At last she said:—

"Patty, I'm sorry I vexed you. I'll not say any more against the girl's coming."

So peace was made, and the sisters sat down quietly to their needlework, and all day Mary was kinder than ever to Becky; and the latter felt at heart how much better a Christian her sister was than herself.



CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the week's punishment was over, Nelly was told of Martha's invitation.

"Mrs. Hone is a good woman," said the aunt, and wishes to be of service to you, Nelly. She knows what kind of a girl you are, and will watch you narrowly, I've no doubt; so take care, child, to be on your best behaviour, for I shall make a point to ask Mrs. Hone all about you, whenever you've paid her a visit. I hope you will be as much ashamed as you ought, that our *low-lodgers* should know that a great girl like *you* can't be trusted alone."

Poor Nelly! She had, as we know, been

longing for weeks to know and visit Mrs. Hone; and, now the wish was granted, it gave her pain, instead of pleasure. It was so mortifying to think her kind neighbour had only asked for her company to keep her out of mischief.

For the first time the child felt sorrow for her disobedience. It was sorrow for having made Mrs. Hone think ill of her. Nelly had not yet learned to grieve for having sinned against a heavenly Father and a merciful Saviour, who had given himself to save her from sin.

It was with uneasy feelings, downcast eyes, and a conscious blush, that Nelly followed her aunt into Mrs. Hone's room. She was alone; her sister, being unexpectedly engaged for the day at the linen warehouse, had this morning left home very early.

"Sit down here, Nelly," said Martha, when the door closed behind the widow. "You shall have this little table near the window. Though you've young eyes, you must want light for that very fine knitting."

"Thank you, Ma'am," said the girl, in a humble voice, taking the seat, but not venturing to look up at Mrs. Hone.

"Have you a long task of work to finish to-day?" asked Martha, kindly.

"Yes, Ma'am, a very long one," replied Nelly, her eyes fixed upon her thread.

"Do you think you can knit as fast when you are talking as when silent?"

"I don't know, Ma'am—I never tried! I've *had nobody*"—to talk to, she would have said, but *she hesitated*, remembering Sally.

"Well, put a mark on your work, and see how much you can do in an hour by that clock of mine over the chimney-piece. I've some cutting-out to do which needs contrivance not to waste the stuff, so I cannot talk to you until I have ended the job."

Nelly obeyed. Conscience whispered,—*"Mrs. Hone will talk about my faults when she has time: perhaps she'll scold me well."* But then she thought,—*"No, she wouldn't be so kind and quiet if she was going to be angry."* This gave her comfort, and her fingers moved like lightning. She was anxious to show her new friend that, if she had been disobedient, she was not an idle girl.

Without being observed, Martha, from time to time, took a glance at the young knitter, and saw her anxious look. She guessed the cause. *"Shall I,"* thought she, *"speak to her of what has passed, or not? She sits there, poor child, in fear. Perhaps if I speak to her at once as a friend, it may open her heart towards me. She has been punished quite enough for her faults already."*

When the hour was nearly over, *"Nelly,"* said Martha, gently, *"if you try to do well in future, you need not be afraid that I shall ever mention to you the faults you have fallen into. You must try, my dear, to make me forget them all as fast as you can. Begin, Nelly, from this day, to watch over yourself, and pray to God that you may not be led into temptation again."*

The young girl looked up at Mrs. Hone,

the expression of Christian love in that woman's countenance deepened the impression her words had made. How unlike was Mar look from the harsh and chilling one of Baisley!

Nelly had a heart: though her aunt had found her way to it, Mrs. Hone had.

"I do not ask you to make me any promise," continued Martha, "for fear you should break them; but I will pray for you, my dear child, that you may have God's grace given to you, and be kept from all sin."

These few words, spoken in a tender, loving spirit, did Nelly more good than bread and water, and a week's silent system.

Fear and shame had vanished, but tearful gratitude stood in the child's eyes.

"I will try to please you, Ma'am," said she in a low voice. "I will pray to be made a better girl."

"Come, now," cried Martha, changing her tone to one of cheerfulness, "we will measure your work, and see how much you can do in an hour; then we shall see how long it will take you to finish it all.—Oh no," added she, "I forgot: we must find out if talking makes your fingers move more slowly. So now we'll talk for an hour, and then measure again."

Nelly made a second mark on her work, and Mrs. Hone began:

"This room, in the middle of the day, is much cooler than yours, which is next to the street. Doesn't your aunt find the heat great sometimes?"

"I don't know, Ma'am: I never hear

complain of it. Aunt doesn't often talk to me about anything; but I think she likes Islington better than the city."

"And do you like these lodgings better than the ones you came from, Nelly?"

"Oh, a great deal better, Ma'am. We couldn't see anything there out of our window, but the great high walls of a warehouse."

"I hear, from Mrs. Jenkins, that your aunt made this change more for your sake, Nelly, than her own. She thought the court you lived in was too close for your health. It must seem a long walk from the school here, when your aunt is tired with her teaching. It was kind of her to think more of you than herself,—don't you think it was, Nelly?"

It had never struck Nelly before that her aunt had left the city from kindness to her, and she paused before she answered—"Yes."

"Mrs. Jenkins also tells me your aunt feeds you, too, better than she does herself."

"Yes, Ma'am." Had she dared to do so, Nelly would have added,—“but I'd much rather have her like you; than only kind in such things as these."

"I hear Mrs. Baisley is the only relation you have who can do anything for you at present. So you see, my dear, all the trouble and expense of bringing you up comes upon her."

"I'm not so *much* expense," thought Nelly.

"Though aunt never tells me what she gets, *I'm quite sure she does* get a good bit of money *or my best fine* knitting."

"You ought to be glad, my dear, that you

are now beginning to help to support you. Where did you learn fancy knitting?"

"At school, in the country, Ma'am; a learnt worsted work and netting, too."

"And didn't you learn plain work?"

"No, Ma'am; most of the girls learne but not me."

"And why was that, Nelly?"

The girl blushed and answered,—

"Because my mother said she wanted n be genteel, and to learn music, and fancy v and French, and I hadn't time for all."

"And were you long at that school?"

"Only about two years; and I didn't go i regular, for they let me stay away wher I liked."

"And did you often like to stay away?"

"Yes, in the summer, on fine days; for I could ride about on a donkey I had o own, and I liked that better than tasks."

"Do you think you were taught wel school?"

"I don't know, Ma'am. Aunt says I w After father died, and I came to her, she sa was a shameful bad school I'd been at."

"Would you like to tell me what reasor gave?" asked Mrs. Hone, with an encoura smile.

Nelly replied instantly: she said, "tl taught me nothing fit for a tradesman's c and that I couldn't read nor spell, and my wr *wasn't fit to* be seen, and they'd stuck me i *think I was a young lady*, and called me Ele Matilda, and liked to see my hair hang

curls on my shoulders, like I don't know what aunt called it."

"And wasn't all this true, Nelly? And can you spell better now?"

"Yes, Ma'am, for aunt don't often scratch out words I've spelt wrong, when I write out on my slate words I've learnt by heart."

"Which do you like best, lessons or work?"

"Do you mean fancy work, Ma'am? I like that much better than books."

The reason Nelly preferred work was, that Mrs. Baisley had nothing to teach her in knitting, and made lessons irksome by her manner of instructing.

"What use has music been to you?"

"The playing hasn't been any use. I wish I'd learnt something instead; but I can sing better with the organ at church, because I know about time."

"Are you fond of music? I've never heard you sing."

"No, Ma'am, because aunt promised Mrs. Jenkins, when she took these lodgings, that I should not make any noise over your head, so I've only hummed very softly to myself sometimes, when I've been tired of being so quiet."

"Well, Nelly, sister and I are fond of hearing singing, so you may sing when you like. Do you know many songs?"

"I used, Ma'am, in the country, but I've forgotten a great many since I came to town."

After more of this kind of conversation, in which Nelly began to feel as if she had known Mrs. Hone all her young life, the clock struck

the second hour. The knitting was again measured, and it was found to Nelly's great satisfaction, that she could work nearly as fast when talking, as when silent.

A little before noon Martha said, "I find I must go out for some thread, for I've none fit for this new work of mine. If you'll be quick in putting on your things, I think you may spare half an hour, and come with me to the shop."

Nelly jumped up in high delight, and ran up to her aunt's room. "Shall I," thought she, "put on my Sunday bonnet? Oh, yes, aunt won't know which I wore, and I can't go with Mrs. Hone in that beggarly thing I wear week days." So the best things were put on, and Nelly tripped down to Mrs. Hone, who took no notice of her appearance, and they went out together.

What a pleasure it was to the child to talk, and feel at liberty to ask questions, which were sure to receive a cheerful, willing answer !

It was a fine fresh day, though very warm in the sun. Mrs. Hone took care to keep as often as she could on the shady side of the streets, and both she and her little friend felt refreshed with the change from sitting still, to gentle exercise in the open air.

"This is a quieter place than the heart of the city to walk in, Nelly," remarked Mrs. Hone. "You're able to look about at the shops here, without being jostled off the pavement ; but I suppose this is quite a bustling street, compared to any you had in your country town."

"Oh, dear, yes, Ma'am. Sometimes I've gone down High-street, at Billington, in the middle

of the day, if it wasn't market, and havn't met eight people."

"Was your father's shop in High Street?"

"Yes, Ma'am, at the top, and we had such a nice garden behind the house, that went down to the brook; and when it was fine like to-day, I used to go and play with my dolls in a pretty arbour, all covered with honey-suckles, near the water, and I might always ask any I liked of my schoolfellows, to come and make feasts with me, and poor father used to give me handfulls of plums and figs out of the shop."

"And were those very happy days, Nelly?"

"Some were, but not all, for I quarrelled with my playfellows, and got tired of playthings very often, and was always wanting something I couldn't have."

"Are you happy at this moment, Nelly?"

"Yes, very happy," replied she, looking up at Martha, with an ingenuous smile.

"Shall I tell you why, my dear? Isn't it because you have been working so well all the morning, and doing your duty?"

"Yes," said Nelly; "but that's not all. It's because too I'm with you, and you're so kind to me, and because *you* are pleased with my working well."

"There is One, dear child, who will make you much happier than I can, if you learn to love and please Him."

After talking a little more, they came to the haberdasher's, and the shop not being very full, Mrs. Hone was soon served.

While Martha was waiting to pay her little

bill, a handsome, well-dressed young woman came into the shop, and took a chair next to Nelly by the counter. She soon pulled towards her a large basket of very pretty, long remnants of ribbon, and began to turn them over, as if about to choose one.

Nelly, who was standing partly behind her, watched to see which she would select, fancying in her own mind which would be her own choice, when, to her dismay, she saw the lady cunningly slip one of the fullest rolls of ribbon into her silk bag, which she had put on the counter, close to the basket.

"Oh, Mrs. Hone," whispered Nelly, putting her trembling hand on her friend's arm, "that young lady has"—

Martha turned suddenly towards Nelly, and saw her with a face like scarlet; but before the child could add another word, the master of the shop came up quickly behind the thief, and putting her silk bag into his pocket, desired the owner to follow him directly into a back-room behind the shop.

The wretched young woman looked eagerly towards the door by which she had entered the shop, as though she would make her escape; but a policeman stood just before it, as if on the watch; and the terrified culprit, with a face which Nelly did not soon forget, followed the shopkeeper to a private room.

No one in the shop but Nelly and the master had perceived what had past, and he had evidently wished to save the young woman from the *shame of a public exposure*.

As Nelly was explaining what she had seen to Mrs. Hone, the bill and change were brought back to her, and she and Nelly left the shop.

Then the child eagerly told her tale, at which Martha was greatly shocked.

"How dreadful for her friends and parents," exclaimed Mrs. Hone; "if she has any!"

"Oh, Ma'am," asked Nelly, "do you think she'll be transported? How could she be so wicked? She looked quite like a rich young lady, who had plenty of money to buy ribbons. Oh, I do hope the master of the shop will forgive her, and not send her to prison. How shocking that would be!"

"It would indeed, Nelly; but that would be better than letting her off to go on into more and more wickedness."

"But how, Ma'am, do you think such a lady could have learned to be a thief?"

"Perhaps she began when she was a child by being artful, and stealing little things at home—perhaps she was tempted by love of dress, to take the gay-coloured ribbon."

These words struck Nelly. She had often been deceitful, and had dearly loved finery. She walked on some time in silence, then inquired—

"Do you think, Mrs. Hone, you shall ever hear what becomes of her?"

"Very likely I may, my dear, for I know the shopkeeper. I can't tell you, Nelly, how glad I am for your sake, and my own, that Mr. Ray saw her take the ribbon, for if not, we should have been obliged to accuse her. It makes me shake only to think of it."

The thought almost made Nelly shake too ; and scarcely another word was said till they reached home. The walk back from Mr. Ray's was far from being as pleasant as the walk there ; but the lesson Nelly had received at the shop was not lost.

As she was putting away her bonnet, she thought of what she had said on putting it on, and made up her mind after dinner to tell Mrs. Hone, and thus show her she was anxious to follow her advice, and begin to be truthful.

Martha now called from below,—“ If you like, Nelly, you may bring down your dinner, and eat it with me !”

The child did not require asking a second time, and her meal being only a little bit of cold meat and potatoes, she was not long bringing it down.

“ Perhaps,” said Martha, when she had said grace, “ you would like some of my beefsteak-pie, instead of your mutton. You may leave that for your aunt's supper.”

“ Oh, thank you, Ma'am,” exclaimed Nelly, “ I should like it very much. I've not tasted a bit of pie for months and months, and I do so love crust.”

“ I hope you are not greedy,” said Martha, in a grave tone.

Nelly coloured, and looked ashamed ; but after a few minutes, said—“ When I was little, Ma'am, and had lots of nice things to eat at home, father used to praise me for not being greedy ; and I know I didn't care much for things to eat then.”

“ Don’t you think it sounds greedy, to say, I do so love things to eat?”

Nelly blushed again, and replied meekly, “ I’m so often hungry now, Ma’am, and don’t get near enough sometimes, and that makes me think food so good ; but I’ll try to remember what you say.”

Martha was now half sorry she had found fault. She helped Nelly plentifully to pie, and then said, smiling, “ You know, my dear, if I’m to be your friend, you must let me tell you of little faults I see in you, as well as big ones. It’s not wrong to like nice food ; but we must not love it, Nelly.”

The conversation turned after dinner on the shoplifter, and then Nelly told Mrs. Hone about the bonnet. On which Martha said, “ These may seem but very little things to notice, Nelly ; but if we are truthful in such small matters, we are quite sure not to deceive in great ones. I am very pleased you have told me this.”

The dinner things being removed, knitting and plain-work went on till half-past four, when Nelly’s task was completed.

“ You have been very industrious, Nelly,” said Mrs. Hone, kindly, “ and deserve to be amused till your aunt comes home. If you are fond of pictures, you may take out that first book on the lowest shelf of my bookcase.”

It contained a set of good coloured Scripture prints—and Mrs. Hone putting away her work, looked over many of them with Nelly, making *them very interesting* by her observations. For the last year and a half Nelly had read the Bible

daily, and was at no loss to understand the histories the prints represented.

Time flew but too quickly for the boy Nelly, and she felt quite sorry when she heard her aunt's heavy footsteps on the stairs, and her tap at Mrs. Hone's door.

"Come in," cried Martha; and after a few words passed, said cheerfully, "I hope, Baisley, as my sister is out, you will be so good as to drink tea with me, and let Nelly stay."

The child looked up, anxiously awaiting her aunt's answer.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hone," said Mrs. Baisley gravely; "but I think by this time you must have had enough of Nelly's company."

"Oh, no. Do stay this once," cried Martha smiling; "and if you don't like my tea-making I won't be offended if you won't stay another time."

Mrs. Baisley agreed to remain, and sent Nelly up with her bonnet, sat down to the table where Mrs. Hone was putting the tea-things.

"I've no fault to find with your niece to-day," said Martha.

"I'm glad of it," observed the widow, calmly.

On Nelly's return she went up to her room and timidly began—"You've often told me, Ma'am, never to wear my Sunday things on week-days; but Mrs. Hone took me out to-day and I put on my best bonnet."

"Because you knew I was out, and could prevent you," observed Mrs. Baisley, sharply. "*Just like you!*"

"No, aunt," cried Nelly, looking up.

wasn't quite that. I thought too I ought to be tidy to walk with Mrs. Hone.

"Well, if you *did* think that," said the widow, "it was a better reason, child, than you often have, for not doing as I tell you."

Martha made her guest a cup of her best tea, and did all she could to entertain her, in order to show she wished to be on neighbourly terms with her fellow-lodger.

It was not easy to get on with one so cold, reserved, and silent, as the widow, yet Martha succeeded to a certain degree in winning upon her, and before tea was over Mrs. Baisley was led on to talk a little about the School of Correction where she was employed.

Nelly little guessed how much for her sake Mrs. Hone was trying to please her aunt. She sat drinking her tea without opening her lips, with a face whose expression was very unlike the one she had had when alone with Martha.

According to custom, in the evening, Mrs. Baisley proposed taking Nelly out for a walk. Martha kindly shook her new young friend by the hand on parting, and Nelly left the room with a few more good thoughts in her mind than she had brought in with her in the morning.

It does not require many hours to sow one or two good seeds in the heart, which may by a blessing from on High bring forth good fruit.

As we have seen, Nelly had never been hitherto well trained. Spoiled by a bad mother until nine years of age, then left to run wild for *a year or two*, and then subjected to the harsh *rule of a relation* prejudiced against her, the girl

had never known the gentle guidance
tian love.

Excepting the affair at the shop, this
been the happiest Nelly had known for
and the hope of frequent visits to M
seemed to put new life and vigour int
who had been depressed in spirits by
natural solitary life.



CHAPTER V.

THE next day, of course, Martha saw nothing of her young friend, but on the following she awoke up early to Mrs. Baisley to invite Nelly. The child coloured with joy, and began directly to look out all the needles and cotton she should require, while Mrs. Hone went down and placed a little seat for her by the window, out of Rebecca's way. She need not have given herself the trouble, for Mrs. Baisley soon descended with a grim face, and said, "I shan't allow Nelly to come down to-day, Mrs. Hone, she has vexed me very much since you were up-stairs."

"Oh! what has she done?" asked Martha in sorrow and surprise.

"Thrown down a bottle of ink through her abominable carelessness, all over a new copy-book that cost me fourpence only last week."

"Is that all?" cried Becky, pertly. "Well, Mrs. Baisley, I do think you need not keep her a prisoner all day for such a little thing as that; I'll buy her a new fourpenny copy-book if you'll forgive her and let her come to us."

The manner in which Becky said this did not unfortunately tend to sweeten Mrs. Baisley's bad temper, and she answered proudly—

"You may find a better use for your fourpence, Miss Rebecca, than in rewarding the girl for being thoughtless, and I'm not going to neglect *my* duty by sparing the rod and spoiling the child. She shan't come down to-day."

"Why don't you beg for her?" said Becky, turning round suddenly to her sister. "I'm sure *you* don't think children ought to be punished for all faults the same. Poor mother never used—"

"Hush! hush, dear," cried Martha, laying her hand on her sister's arm. "You know very well you and I have no right to interfere with Mrs. Baisley and her niece."

"Good morning, Mrs. Hone," said the widow, turning her back on Rebecca and stalking out of the room.

We will not here repeat the abuse which Becky now bestowed on her fellow-lodger.

When her anger subsided, Martha, though inwardly much vexed with her sister, for her injudicious conduct, said quietly to her—

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your aunt, and gave her much trouble, didn't you?"

"Yes, Ma'am, sometimes," answered Nelly, candidly.

"Then you know too, you have not always been as truth-telling as I hope and trust you are praying now to be."

Nelly blushed and looked down.

"Do you think," continued Martha, in a still kinder tone, "that if you had never deceived your aunt she would not have believed that you spoke the truth about the ink?"

Such reasoning as this had never entered the child's mind. She felt its force, but said to herself, "Aunt ought to have tried to find out whether I was right or wrong in what I said about the accident, before she punished me."

"Will you tell me, Nelly, what you felt most that day? Was it sorrow at not coming to us, or anger at your punishment?"

After a little hesitation the young girl answered,—

"I don't know which, Ma'am: I was very disappointed not to be with you; but I was very angry too, with aunt, and could not help wishing something might happen at the school to vex her very much, and make her as unhappy as she'd made me."

"Do you never say the Lord's Prayer, Nelly?"

"Yes, Ma'am," replied she, looking up, surprised at the question; "I say it morning and night."

"And do you know the meaning of the words,

‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us?’”

“Yes, Ma’am, aunt has explained all the Lord’s Prayer to me.”

“You think your aunt trespassed against you the other day. Have you never trespassed or sinned against God much more than your aunt against you?”

“I’ve often done wrong,” said Nelly; “but I never thought about that when I said that part of the Lord’s Prayer.”

“Do you know whom we ought to copy most?”

“Yes. Jesus Christ,” answered Nelly, seriously.

“Did He wish people to be vexed and hurt who had been unkind to Him, Nelly? Don’t you remember how He forgave them and prayed for them when He could have punished them?” The good woman paused, and then added, “I don’t think your aunt was as wrong as you do, because she really thought you had been careless; but suppose, Nelly, she had punished you when she knew you did *not* deserve it, wouldn’t it still have been wicked to wish her the harm you did?”

“It is so hard to forgive people that are so cross and unkind to us,” said Nelly.

“It is, indeed, my dear child, and nobody can do it without God’s helping them; but He can make it easy. You must pray to love your aunt, and then you’ll see that a great deal she does which you don’t like, is meant for your good.”

Rebecca now returned from putting the bedroom to rights and sat down to sew, and the sisters talked for some time about the work they

had in hand. Even in this common-place conversation there was some amusement for Nelly, who was easily interested in anything going on about her.

Then Becky asked her many questions about the country, and she was delighted to describe Rillington, her native place, and its neighbourhood and the pretty walks, and rides she used to take when she was a little child living at home.

In the afternoon Rebecca had occasion to go out shopping to the haberdashers for a short time, and her sister begged her to inquire of Mr. Ray what had been done about the shop-lifter.

While Becky was away the conversation between Martha and her little friend turned on the lessons the latter had said that morning to her aunt, and Nelly was requested to repeat one of the Psalms she had learnt. She chose the twenty-third, and repeated it quite correctly, and in a manner that showed pains had been taken with her pronunciation and tone of voice.

Then Mrs. Hone told her several interesting stories about shepherds and sheep, and of the fierce wild beasts which in Eastern lands are the enemies of flocks, and then she showed her why our Blessed Lord was called the Good Shepherd, and how, if we belong to his fold, he guards us from all our enemies, and how he laid down his life for His flock.

Some of this Nelly had been taught, but it had never come home to her as it did now.

"How did you learn so many nice stories, Ma'am?" asked she of Mrs. Hone.

"When I was about your age, I used to go for

an hour or two almost every day, to read to a young lady who was quite blind. My mother, before she married, had been nurse to this young lady and loved her dearly, and Miss Rice loved mother. She was a very kind and very clever lady, and used to take great pains to teach me the meaning of everything I read to her. I can never be thankful enough to her for all she did for me. I wish I could teach as she used."

"Do you know her now?" inquired Nelly.

"No, my dear, she has been dead many years. She was much older than I was."

"Don't you know any more stories to tell me about sheep, please, Ma'am?" asked Nelly, modestly.

"Yes; I know another true one. It's in verse, but I think perhaps you'd like it better if I tell it not in verse."

"Oh, I like verses very much," cried Nelly.

Mrs. Hone then repeated the following lines:—

THE FLOCK.

Hark ! the midnight storm is raging
Over field and over wood,
And the rain in rushing torrents
Pours around, a sweeping flood.

Flash on flash, the fatal lightning
Follows ; then the jagged hail,
And the shepherd on his pallet
Feels his heart begin to fail :

For his helpless flock are lying
Penn'd afar in open fold ;
Ah, he dreads the coming morning,
Many dying to behold.

Now the lightning flashes fainter,
Wind and thunder cease their roar,
And the anxious shepherd rising,
Trembling opes his cottage door.

Forth he goes to seek the pasture
Where his distant sheep-cotes lie ;
What a sight upon his threshold
Meets the careful shepherd's eye !

All his flock are gather'd near him,
Close they press around his cot,
Hedge and hurdle have not held them ;
Wind and tempest stay'd them not.

In the hour of darkest terror
They have found their shepherd's home.
Wondrous ! To that lonely dwelling,
They, ere now, had never come.

Oh, may we, when deepest sorrow
Like a tempest on us falls,
Thus be guided through the darkness,
To a better Shepherd's walls !

When Martha ended, Nelly exclaimed—
“ And is it really all true ? Did the sheep
their way all in the dark to a place where
had never been at ? I never heard such a
derful thing, Ma'am, did you ? ”

“ No,” replied Mrs. Hone, “ I never did :
I know that the story is quite true. It happ
near a place called Marlborough.”

“ What a pretty story ! and can the verse
sung ? ”

“ Yes ; I have taught them to our neighb
grandchildren, and they sing them to the
called in Hymn books ‘ The Sicilian Marine

“ Oh, I know that tune very well,” cried N

in a voice of pleasure. "How I should like to learn the verses?"

"I will say them over to you until you know them, Nelly. Shall we begin directly?"

"Oh yes, if you please, Ma'am."

Mrs. Hone repeated the first two verses, and then asked if Nelly perfectly understood them.

"I don't know," she replied, "why it calls the hail jagged. I thought hail was round and smooth, like sugar-plums."

"It is so in general; but once, in a very bad storm, I saw hail like rough pieces of ice, with jagged sides. Do you ever remember a very bad storm, Nelly?"

"Oh yes, Ma'am; there was once such a bad one at Rillington, that the rain made the brook rise up half over our garden, and the wind blew down our cherry-tree. I remember how the thunder and lightning frightened me in my bed at night, and poor father coming up to sit by me. I think it must have been just such a storm as it tells about in the verses."

"I suppose you have often seen sheep in a fold, my dear?"

"Yes; there was a large hilly field opposite the back of our house, and there was often a large fold full of sheep on the top of the hill; and I used to like to see the shepherd shut the sheep up at night, and let them out in the morning. He was a kind old man, and wouldn't let his boys or his dogs teaze the poor things; and they seemed very fond of him, and followed him about. Don't you think, Ma'am, the shepherd in the verses must have been like him?"

"Yes, I do, Nelly; and I am glad you seen and noticed these things, because they make you understand better, those bea verses—'He shall feed his flock like a shep He shall gather the lambs in his arms, and them in his bosom.' When you are alone unhappy, my dear child, like a poor lamb has lost all its companions, would it not co you to believe that your good Shepherd close to you, though you could not see I And when you are struggling to get rid o thoughts, like a sheep to free itself from ta thorns, would it not comfort you to know good Shepherd would come to help you moment you called upon Him?"

"Yes, I think it would, indeed, Ma'am." paused, then said, "Now, please, would yo so kind as to say over the first two verses fo once more?"

Mrs. Hone kindly complied, and before becca returned, Nelly had learned four v perfectly.

Becky brought a sad tale of the thief Mr. Ray's. The wretched young woman stolen many things, at different shops, valuable than ribbon, and had been committ take her trial. She was the daughter of respectable parents, and her conduct had a broken the heart of her mother. Rebecca been further informed by Mr. Ray, that even child this young person had given great au to her family, by her want of truth, and lo deceit.

"Look what sly ways lead to!" said Bec

Nelly; when the sad story was ended; "and mind you remember, when you are inclined to be cunning and to say what's not true, to take warning from the thief in Mr. Ray's shop. Take my word for it, Nelly, my dear, sooner or later all dishonest tricks, and lies too, are found out."

Nelly grew very red. She felt hurt at Rebecca's pointed speech: it seemed to her an unkind allusion to her former faults.

Martha, who was as quick at reading the feelings of others as Rebecca was slow, perceived Nelly's confusion, and instantly turned the conversation to some indifferent subject. This did not, however, prevent the fate of the shop-lifter from filling Nelly's mind for the rest of the day, and leaving an impression never to be effaced.

Here let us remark the contrast between the teaching of the two sisters. Whenever Martha spoke to Nelly of sin, it was to show her how hateful a thing it was in the sight of God, and how it had cost a Saviour's precious blood.

When Rebecca spoke of sin, it was only as we have just seen, to point out the disgrace, and misery, and ruin it generally brings after it in this world. She did not know, or did not recollect, how quickly the most terrible example of the punishment of sin is often forgotten by those who do not see in that punishment God's curse upon evil doings.

From this time forward, few weeks elapsed without an invitation being given by the ~~House~~

to Nelly to pass the whole time of her aunt's absence with them; and the sisters (and especially Martha) became more and more interested in a girl who might well be called an orphan in the true sense of the word.

All those excellent Christian lessons which Martha had learned in her early youth from the blind Miss Rice, she now taught to Nelly; but Martha's example did still more than her precepts: she practised what she preached. No lesson in words could be better for Nelly than the contrast between the two sisters. In some ways, Rebecca's treatment of Martha was a little like Mrs. Baisley's treatment of her niece. As we have observed, there were times when the elder sister, do what she would, could not succeed in pleasing the younger; yet how seldom did Nelly see an angry look, or hear an impatient word, from her kind teacher.

The girl now perfectly understood and admired the principle upon which Mrs. Hone acted. She knew that a sense of her own sins, and gratitude towards a merciful Saviour who had forgiven them, made Martha so compassionate to the faults of others.

The society of such a woman as Mrs. Hone had soon weaned Nelly from any wish to be on familiar terms again with the vulgar Sally. Still Martha was well aware how natural it is for the young to love the company of the young; and whenever she had the opportunity, she would ask a next-door neighbour to allow her young granddaughter to come in, to spend an hour or *two with Nelly.*

Of course this was done with Mrs. Baisley's approbation.

Fanny Reeve, the young person thus invited, was the girl whom Nelly had seen, with a little sister in her arms, in the garden adjoining Mrs. Jenkins's, on the day Mrs. Baisley had been so greatly displeased at her niece's idleness in not completing her given task.

Fanny was a few months older than Nelly, and the eldest of a large family. Her father kept a butter and cheese shop in a court leading out of one of the great city thoroughfares. He was a religious man, and endeavoured, with his wife's help, to bring up all his children in the love and fear of God.

Fanny's good training had been greatly blessed. Though now not quite fourteen, she was as steady as many a grown-up woman, and of great use to her mother in helping to nurse, and take charge of, and teach her little brothers and sister.

Whenever the younger ones required change of air, Fanny was always sent with them to their grandmother's at Islington; and thus she became known to the Hones.

Old Mrs. Reeve had been a widow for some years. Her husband had kept the same shop now occupied by Fanny's father. By industry and economy, he had saved enough money to leave his widow a comfortable little income for life; and Mrs. Reeve was thus able to help her son, and his deserving wife, without distressing herself.

Fanny Reeve was as unlike Nelly Mercer in person as she was in disposition. She had dark

hair and eyes, and rather a sturdy figure; whereas Nelly was light-haired, and slender in form. Fanny was courageous, and Nelly timid: the former a little warm in temper, and lively; the latter fretful, and easily cast down.

The different life they had lived the last two years had brought the one forward, and kept the other back; so that Nelly seemed a child compared with Fanny.

As the girls became better acquainted, Nelly was struck by this, and said one day to Mrs. Hone,—

“Don’t you think, Ma’am, Fanny seems much older than I do? She must be a very clever girl. I can’t tell how ever she can find time to do all the needle-work she does, with that baby of a child, Bessie, always toddling about her, and wanting to be amused. I’m sure I should never be able to take care of children as she does.”

“She is a clever girl, and a good one too,” said Martha; “but she would not have been what she is without God’s blessing on the teaching of good parents.”

Nelly gave a deep sigh, and said in an humble tone,—

“I seem to be of no use to anybody in the world. I only work for myself, and Fanny does so much for other people, and helps to make so many happy. It makes me so sad, Ma’am, when I compare myself with Fanny.”

“My dear child,” observed Mrs. Hone, “do you remember the parable of the talents? You know God does not give the same number of *talents* to each of us, nor the same kind of

talents. He has been pleased to give you much fewer duties at present to do than He has given Mrs. Reeve's granddaughter. You have but one relation in the world to please, and Fanny has many. Are you, my dear, making as good a use of your one talent as your young friend is of her five? Are you doing everything your aunt wishes you to do in the very best way you are able?"

"No, I'm afraid not," replied Nelly, sadly.

"Do you pray for help to do it, my dear Nelly?"

"Yes, Ma'am; but still the thought will come —" Nelly stopped and coloured.

"What thought will come?" asked Martha. "You are not afraid to tell me anything now, Nelly. You know I am your friend."

"The thought will come, that I shall never be able to love aunt, though she has done so much for me; and I am afraid God will be angry with me for not doing it."

"Nelly," said Mrs. Hone, looking at her earnestly, "do you feel the same towards your aunt as you did that first day you ever paid me a visit in this room?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Ma'am! I couldn't bear her then: I was always wishing something would happen to force her to send me out to service, or anywhere else away from her; and I often had wicked thoughts about her, and never felt a bit thankful, till you put it in my head, for all she'd done for me since poor father died."

"And is she not kinder to you than she used to be; and don't you see, as I do, how much more she trusts you than when you first came here?"

"Yes," replied Nelly; "but for all that I feel I shall never love her; and when I think she is the only relation I've got belonging to me in the world, it makes me very unhappy. I love Fanny Reeve, and I'm glad she has such kind friends; but when I'm by myself, I can't help crying a little sometimes, when I think how happy she is at home, and that I've no father and no mother, and nobody to care for me. If it hadn't been for you, Ma'am, I don't know what would have come to me, I was growing so miserable and so wicked before aunt brought me to Islington."

The tender heart of Mrs. Hone was touched at this confession of poor Nelly's. She took her hand, and, pressing it in her own, said—"If you will pray to believe this text, Nelly, you will never have such sad thoughts again: 'When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up.' I once knew a young girl, many years ago, who found the greatest comfort from believing that text. She was an orphan, and much worse off than you. She was the apprentice of a dressmaker, who was a cruel woman, and treated her most unkindly,—the more so as she had no friends to take her part. She was often required to work twelve or fourteen hours a-day, and very badly fed. She seldom breathed the fresh air, except on Sunday, and generally worked in a dirty close attic. Yet she was far happier than you, Nelly, because she knew God was her Father; and she waited in patience, like a good and dutiful child, till He should think right to give her a more comfortable home. Won't you pray to do the same, Nelly, and be thankful for

what your Heavenly Father has begun to do for you here, by giving you my sister, and me, and Fanny for friends?"

"Yes, I will," cried Nelly. "Wasn't it you, Ma'am, who taught that poor apprentice to think of that text? and did you very often see her?"

"No, my dear; and if I had, she could have taught me much more than I could have taught her; and, after the first year of her apprenticeship, I saw very little of her. Her unkind mistress, finding that the girl took pleasure in being with me, forbade her coming."

"Aunt has not done so by me," thought Nelly; "she has been kind in that."

"And what's become of her at last, Ma'am?"

"When her time was nearly out, a very excellent lady, who had noticed the girl's most regular and devout behaviour for months at church, made inquiries about her. On finding she wished to go into service instead of business (her health having severely suffered from the life she had led,) the lady took her into her own family, and there she has lived, loved and respected ever since."

In the evening after this conversation, Nelly went out for a walk with Rebecca, instead of her aunt; and on her return was much pleased to see all the whiting washed off Mrs. Baisley's windows, and the lower sash thrown up, making the room look quite light and cheerful. The girl was inclined to thank her aunt, but a timid feeling prevented her.



CHAPTER VI.

A FEW weeks after this, Mrs. Baisley came home one evening with something like a smile on her face, and said to Nelly, in almost a cheerful voice—

“Well, Nelly, whom do you think I’ve got a letter from to-day, and a little money, too?”

“Not from brother John?” asked the girl with a pleased surprise.

“Yes, from your brother John; and I told me he has written to me three times since my last letter saying your poor father was dead, but I’ve never had any but his first letter. I’ve been very uneasy for months about him, *was afraid* something had happened to him.”

"Is he quite well?" asked Nelly, with great interest.

"Yes, quite well, he says, and getting on by degrees. He has left the sea, and is settled in America. He writes like a dutiful lad, as he is, and promises to help me as soon as ever he has it in his power. I see he has the same warm heart he always had as a little child, and loves me just the same."

Nelly longed, but dared not ask, "Has he sent any message to me?" After a time, her aunt took a little packet out of her pocket, saying, "Your brother names you at the end of his letter." Then Mrs. Baisley, opening the letter, read as follows:—"Give my best love to dear little Elinor. Tell her, I hope she is growing a good girl, and getting rid of all the bad tricks and ways that vexed you so much. Tell her to work hard with her learning, for when I set up a shop of my own, you and she, dear Aunt, must come and help me to keep it, and the more she knows of cyphering the better book-keeper she'll make. You're such a capital schoolmistress, I'm sure by this time, if all's gone well, you must have taught Elinor to write a first-rate hand. Do let her send me a line in your next. I don't want her to forget she has a brother, who is willing to do what he can to supply her poor father's place. Give her a kind kiss for me; and, if you like, spend a few shillings on her from what I send."

"There, child, what do you say to that?" exclaimed the widow, as she folded the letter. "You ought to be full of thankfulness for such

brother. I hope all this kindness will not be thrown away, but that you will try to deserve it, by going on improving faster than you've ever done yet."

The little want of kindness in the tone of this speech, damped for a moment the pleasure which Nelly felt on hearing her brother's affectionate messages; but the feeling of vexation soon passed away, and she said, "John is very good, and very kind. Can't you please tell him, Aunt, when you write, that I am trying to be a better girl?"

"Certainly, I shall say you are a little improved, though I still wish you were very different, in many ways, from what you are. If you had been more like your dear brother, we should have got on, Nelly, much better together than we have done."

"What am I most different in?" inquired Nelly, in a respectful manner.

"Why, though I can't call you an idle girl now as I used to do, there's no spirit in anything you do. You don't work with all your might, like John, and you're not open-hearted and grateful as he was, and I'm afraid you have very little natural affection, for I see clear enough, Nelly (though may be you don't know it) that you care a hundred times more for Mrs. Hone than you do for your own father's sister. You would be a bad girl indeed, if you did not feel obliged to our fellow-lodgers for all their kindness; and everybody must have a respect for Mrs. Hone; but if you took after your brother, you would never take to strangers as you've done, and

love them better than your own flesh and blood."

It was with no feelings of jealousy that Mrs. Baisley thus reproached her niece for preferring Martha Hone to herself. She merely felt what she expressed, that among Nelly's other faults and failings, want of natural affection ought to be reckoned.

We may here again remark, how strangely blind Mrs. Baisley was to her niece's real disposition. What a pity it was she could not have overheard Nelly's conversations with her gentle friend! These might perhaps have led the prejudiced widow to ask herself, if all the want of natural affection lay on the side of poor Nelly.

We may easily imagine the pleasure Nelly felt, in repeating her brother's kind message to the Hones.

"See, my dear child," said the good Martha, "how wrong you were in thinking you had no relation in the world to care for you. While you were crying by yourself, and saying you had no father, there was your kind brother over the seas thinking how he could help you. Won't this teach you, Nelly, to trust more to God's goodness for the time to come?"

"Yes," said the girl; "but the only thing I don't like to think of is, that if John sets up shop and sends for us, I shall be forced to leave you and Miss Becky."

"Don't fuss yourself about what may never be," cried Rebecca. "Money doesn't grow like blackberries; and it may be years before your brother's rich enough to set up in business."

sides, who knows but he may change his mind and come back to settle here in England, or a hundred things else may happen. Perhaps you may be settled yourself before then."

"At any rate," observed Martha, with a friendly smile, "we must not think too much about the future. You know, Nelly, who says, 'Take no thought for the morrow.' When John sends for you, it will be time enough to think of parting; so now, my dear, cheer up, and make yourself as happy as you can, and show you are thankful for having the blessing of a good brother. That's a blessing, Nelly, Becky and I never knew."

The good news of the nephew, whom she sincerely loved, had a favourable effect on Mrs. Baisley's temper and spirits. She was delighted to know that he had left the sea to return to the employment of his father, and the assurance of his unchanged affection for herself gave her great hope and comfort.

It was not long before Nelly perceived this change in her stern aunt. It gave her courage to talk to her with more freedom. She would often speak of her brother, and ask many questions about his childish days. The aunt and niece had now, for the first time, the same object of interest and affection, and their long talks about John did more to warm Mrs. Baisley's heart towards Nelly, than anything before had ever done.

When the widow answered her nephew's letter, Nelly was allowed to add a few affectionate lines, *which even Mrs. Baisley said, "were not amiss,*

as to wording and handwriting," and in which the Hones, though they did not tell Nelly their opinion, "thought the ideas excellently expressed for so young a girl."

The two sovereigns which John had sent, were carefully put by for times of need, as neither the widow nor her niece was at present in want of anything new in clothing.

As the Hones and Mrs. Baisley became on more intimate terms, Martha found she could occasionally, without giving offence, ask for trifling favours to be granted to Nelly.

Among the first of these, was the permission to allow the girl's hair to grow long, in order that she might wear it like that of Fanny Reeve, in plain bands on the forehead, and in a simple twisted knot behind.

Small as was this favour, it was a very great one in Nelly's eyes ; for she had again and again been put to a painful blush out of doors, by fancying persons stared as they passed her, on noticing what Becky had called her docked hair. We must own, both Mrs. Baisley and Nelly were singular enough in their appearance to attract the attention of several busy neighbours : the aunt so very large and dark, drest in old-fashioned widow's weeds, and the niece so very slight and fair, in a dress which, the widow's cap excepted, greatly resembled the aunt's. Among two or three families in the street, they were called in jest, "The big black widow, and the little white widow."

The extreme pleasure and gratitude Nelly expressed to Mrs. Hone for having gained this favour

for her, made that true friend fear that the young girl had more personal vanity than she had yet perceived; but, on talking to her on the subject, Martha found that the dislike to singularity had greatly caused Nelly to be so pleased at the thought of being permitted to wear her hair like other girls of her own age.

Mrs. Hone was not one of those persons who think it right to tell a good-looking girl that she is not prettier than her plain companions. She felt that this is as foolish as it is wrong. No; she tried to teach that a pleasing exterior is a gift from God; and if it give to any one an influence over their fellow-creatures, (as, in many instances, it certainly does,) that influence, as every other gift from God, must be accounted for.

Led by Mrs. Hone's taste and approval, Nelly's great wish was to imitate Fanny Reeve; and, could her aunt have given her the same kind of neat but not singular dress as that of her young friend, Nelly would have been quite satisfied, and never sighed for anything gayer. Her love for such unsuitable finery as she had worn, during the years when she was called Eleonora Matilda, had long before this been fading away, under the influence of improving principle; and the tales Mrs. Hone told of the evils to which she herself had seen a love of dress often lead, had the more effect on Nelly's mind, as their truth was unhappily confirmed by her own experience of what had happened at home.

Soon after Mrs. Baisley came to lodge at Mrs. Jenkins', the Hones had discovered, by the silence

of the aunt and niece on the subject, that there was some mystery connected with the child's mother; but Martha was little aware, when describing a vain, extravagant woman among her former acquaintance, whose fondness for dress and company had ruined her husband, that she was drawing an exact picture of poor Nelly's worthless mother.

And now, for many months, few changes occurred at Mrs. Jenkins', except that Sally, having completed her two years' service, left to better herself; and her place was supplied by a quiet woman of middle age, who had been a sick-nurse, and was hired partly to assist Mrs. Jenkins in attending on her husband, now becoming gradually more infirm and helpless.

Towards the spring, the demand among the ladies at Mrs. Baisley's school for Nelly's knitting growing less, Mrs. Hone kindly proposed to teach the girl plain work, and to procure for her, if possible, employment from the ready-made linen warehouse, for which she and Rebecca worked.

This offer was gladly accepted by Mrs. Baisley; and Nelly proved so apt a scholar, that there was danger of her being puffed up by the praise bestowed on her by the injudicious Becky.

"Well, I never in my life," cried she, "saw a girl learn to gather, and whip, and make button-holes so well, in such a short time as you, Nelly. There's not a woman working now for Mrs. Smith who could beat you at it. And, look here, Patty, at the stitching in this fine shirt-front; isn't it

beautiful ? One would think Nelly had served an apprenticeship to the trade, instead of being quite a new hand at it." Then, patting her playfully on the shoulder, Rebecca added, " You're certainly a very clever little thing, after all, though somebody up above stairs, that I won't name, can't open their eyes wide enough to find it out."

At this Martha looked grave, and observed quietly, " Nelly has learned to work very soon ; but you know, Becky, she did not make her own quick eyes and hands ; and besides, though she has not been much used to the best kind of plain work, her fingers are supple enough from having done so much knitting and netting. If her hands had been stiff and clumsy, like many girls' we have known, she could not have got on so fast as she has ; and so I don't see, dear, that she deserves so much praise for doing what was easy to her."

Nelly, who had been extremely delighted at Rebecca's speech, now looked a little disappointed at Martha's ; but, happily, she had long been convinced that Mrs. Hone was the best friend she had in the world, and she valued the opinion of the elder sister far more than that of the younger.

After a pause, Rebecca asked, in rather an unpleasant tone, " Don't you think, Patty, that Nelly ought to have any praise for doing well ?"

" You heard me say," answered Martha mildly, "*that I thought she had done well ; and, you know, I told her some days ago how pleased I*

was that Mrs. Smith was satisfied with her work. I speak as I do so now, because I should be so sorry to see that Nelly's quickness made her grow conceited."

"Oh, there's not a bit of fear of that," cried Becky confidently; "is there, child?"

Nelly blushed slightly, and answered, "I don't know."

"Don't say that," said Martha gently; "if you give yourself time to think, you'll see, Nelly, there *is* fear. I know it from myself; for I was very much inclined to be conceited at your age, and to think myself much better than others, because I could learn very fast all that good Miss Rice taught me; but she soon found out how I was getting puffed up with conceit. It often puzzled me to think how she could know my thoughts, without eyes to watch my looks, but somehow she did know them; and I remember, just as if it was but yesterday, her saying what I've been trying to say to you, only Miss Rice did it in a better way than I could; for she was a lady, and had had the best of education, and knew how to bring in texts to prove she taught me right. I recollect, Nelly, one text she showed me at that time was this: 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.' At first, I fancied Miss Rice was mistaken in calling me conceited; for nobody before had blamed me for being so, and, perhaps, no one before had seen it: but I soon felt that all she had said was true, and I've had reason, Nelly, to *thank her over and over again for helping me to know myself.*"

"I'm sure I should be very sorry to grow conceited," said Nelly earnestly. "Thank you, Ma'am, for telling me this."

When the girl had retired to her own room, Martha thus began to Rebecca :—

"I've a great favour to ask of you, dear Becky ; it is that you won't speak to Nelly again about her aunt, as you did just now. You know they are only just beginning to feel more kindness for each other ; and it would be such a pity, dear, for us to say or do anything to bring back unkind feelings."

"What in the world do you mean ?" exclaimed Becky, turning round sharply towards her sister. "What did I say, except giving a hint that Mrs. Baisley doesn't do Nelly justice ? and that's no more than truth ; and you know it as well as I do, and can't deny it, Patty."

"That's not the question," observed Mrs Hone quietly. "I quite agree with you that the aunt is still blind to a great deal of poor Nelly's improvement ; and, in short, she do not understand her near as well as we do ; but will it make the child happier, sister, to show her the failings of her aunt, and is it right to do it ? Isn't Mrs. Baisley in the place of Nelly's mother, Becky ? I'm sure you wouldn't tell a child of its parent's faults, would you ?"

To this Rebecca made no reply. Looking a little sulky, she turned from her sister, and went to busy herself with arranging some small ornaments on the mantel-shelf, and nothing was then said. The lesson, however, was *thrown away* ; for Rebecca, in future, as

making any remarks upon Mrs. Baisley before her niece.

Thus did Martha, on every occasion, seek to improve all with whom she had to do. A faithful disciple of the Lord herself, her daily prayer and aim was to bring others to the knowledge of what that Saviour had taught. Who can say they have no time, no opportunity, no power, to benefit their neighbour? What was Martha Hone? A poor, humble needlewoman, scarcely acquainted with more than a dozen persons in the world, passing her days in an obscure street of the humbler part of an outskirt of London, obliged to work without ceasing to procure her daily bread, and yet bestowing a gift beyond price on one young fellow-creature, even the gift of Christian instruction and Christian example. Little did the blind Miss Rice imagine how many would profit from the blessing which had attended her teaching of Martha Hone.



CHAPTER VII.

As spring approached, the church in the City to which Mrs. Baisley and her niece had continued to go, was shut up for repairs and alterations ; and Martha persuaded the widow to accompany Rebecca and herself to the church in Islington, which they had attended for years. This was a new advantage for Nelly. It threw her more with Mrs. Hone on the Sunday ; and, as Martha could not walk as fast as Mrs. Baisley and Becky, they were willing to leave her and the *little white widow* behind to follow slowly. Many a profitable conversation, on the *lessons* of the day or the sermon, often passed

between Martha and Nelly, while returning from church.

Thus things went on till the middle of April, when, late one evening, Nelly was taken very ill, and passed a night of so much restlessness and fever, that Mrs. Baisley, early in the morning, went for Mr. Jenkins' medical man, who lived in the next street. As soon as Mr. Price saw the child, he expressed a fear that she was threatened with an alarming illness, yet said he did not think it would be one of a contagious nature. His opinion proved correct in both instances.

Here was an entirely new trial for Nelly. Since she left the pure air of the country to reside in London, she had at times been ailing and delicate ; but never until now had she ever suffered from severe pain.

We must confess she bore this trial very badly indeed. Not even the habitual fear of her aunt could restrain Nelly's impatience ; and her moans and cries annoyed Mrs. Baisley so much that she threatened, if she were not more patient, to ask Mr. Price to get an admission for her into some hospital.

Nelly well knew her aunt was not one of those who threaten what they have not the slightest intention of performing. The terror of being sent to the hospital, and of being taken from her dear Mrs. Hone to be nursed by strangers, had so powerful an effect on the young girl's mind, that she struggled hard to bear pain without complaint.

Both the Hones were most kind in offering their assistance to the widow, and in taking

their turn in sitting up at night with Nelly; and Dorothy, Mrs. Jenkins' servant, having been a regular nurse, was most useful in preparing and applying the remedies constantly ordered for the suffering girl by Mr. Price. Mrs. Jenkins was willing enough to spare her servant for these offices of kindness, since they cost no money.

Martha always took her place by Nelly's bedside whenever Mrs. Baisley was obliged to be absent; and no mother ever nursed a child with more tenderness. After Mrs. Baisley's rough voice and ways, how soothing to the poor girl were Mrs. Hone's pitying looks, and her sweet-toned voice and gentle movements! Nelly was far too ill to bear being talked to, or read to; yet Martha's occasional very short prayer, or a text or two applicable to the sick, sank deep into the sufferer's heart, and led her to pray for patience and submission.

At the end of three weeks, a favourable change took place in Nelly's state. All pain was gone, and only extreme weakness remained. Now it was that Nelly became fully aware how much she owed to those kind friends who had nursed her by night and by day, and the sacrifices they had made for her.

One morning, after reflecting on this as she lay languidly in her bed, while Martha was working close beside her, she thus began:—

“How good you have all been to me, Ma! I feel so very sorry now I was so impatient, gave so much trouble. I know how wrong *was*; but, indeed, the pain was so very bad

bear, I didn't know sometimes what I was saying or doing."

Mrs. Hone put her hand on Nelly's, which, white and wasted, lay outside the quilt, and said quietly, "We'll talk of this, my dear, when you are quite well. All you have to do just now, Nelly, is to be thankful that God has relieved you from suffering."

Large tears began to roll down Nelly's white cheek; and, as Mrs. Hone gently wiped them away, she said, "Crying is not good for you, nor much talking yet. You must keep yourself very still. Now, shut your eyes, and try to get a short nap before the doctor comes."

"May I say only one thing more?" said Nelly, looking anxiously up at Mrs. Hone.

"Yes, you may," replied she, smiling, "if you can say it without crying."

Nelly strove to command herself, and to say calmly, "Will you forgive me, and ask aunt and Miss Becky to forgive me, for not being patient, and giving so much trouble?"

"I will," answered Martha, quietly.

"And can you love me, Mrs. Hone, as well as you did before I was ill?"

Unseen by Nelly, tears now filled Martha's eyes. She longed to stoop over the pillow, and kiss the pale face of the motherless girl; but she knew that all excitement was injurious in Nelly's weak state, and therefore in a firm and gentle voice she only replied, "I can and I do love you quite as well, so now lie still and try to sleep, my dear."

This illness of Nelly's was a great expense to one so poor as Mrs. Baisley. Though the apo-

thecary's bill was a very moderate one, considering the many visits he had paid, yet it swallowed up all the widow's little hoard in the Savings Bank, including John Mercer's present. The doctor would have willingly waited for his account, had it not been the widow's wish to pay it directly. Mrs. Baisley could not endure the thought of owing a penny to any one.

On the day that Mr. Price paid his last visit. Martha waited on the stairs at her own door, to ask to speak to him in her room when he came down from Mrs. Baisley's.

"What do you think of your young patient?" asked Mrs. Hone. "Will she soon be about again?"

"That depends entirely upon how she is managed," replied Mr. Price; "if she gets plenty of nourishing food, and air, and exercise, and her spirits are kept up, I have no fear but she will do very well. As far as I can judge, she has not a bad constitution."

"Do you know, Sir," asked Mrs. Hone, "that the girl works hard at her needle for her own support? When do you think she will be fit to begin to work again?"

"That's a question I cannot possibly answer. It must, of course, depend on her recovery, and the aunt must judge when the child is strong enough to return to her usual employment; but as I know you take a great interest in this poor girl, I will tell you candidly, that if for some weeks to come she is underfed and overworked, I would not insure her life for a twelvemonth. I've taken a liking to the poor little thing, and shall make a point, as I've told Mrs. Baisley, of

calling in as a friend now and then, to see how her niece progresses."

"You are very kind," exclaimed Martha, with a look of as much gratitude as if Mr. Price had done her a personal favour.

"Not at all, not at all," said the benevolent apothecary; "I wish with all my heart I could do more for her; but I'm a poor man, with a family of eleven children, and not one of them yet old enough to get their own living. And a woman of your sense, Mrs. Hone, must know very well how much easier it is for a medical man to procure help from the rich for the lowest class of poor, than for persons like Mrs. Baisley."

"You are quite right, Sir," observed Martha, "and particularly in such a case as this; for the widow has seen better days, and if she was in the greatest distress, would be hurt if money were offered to her in the way of charity."

"I thought as much," said Mr. Price; "and I only trust she will not let this false pride injure my poor little patient."

"What is to be done?" said Martha to herself, when Mr. Price had quitted the house. "Poor child! she must be underfed and she must be overworked, unless her aunt will let sister and me assist her. I know very well that Becky will be as ready as I am to help; but I must let her take her own way as to how it is to be done, for she so dislikes to follow other people's plans, that if I begin proposing anything, she'll be sure to object to it."

On the doctor's warning being told to Rebecca, and her advice asked, she instantly said:—"T

or three fast-days in a week won't kill two tough old things like me and you, Patty. We'll go without dinner sometimes, and give poor Nelly the meat we should have eaten ourselves."

"I was sure you would think of this," cried Mrs. Hone, looking kindly at her sister.

"The widow's pride is the only hitch I can see to the plan. You must try, Patty, and get the better of that: you'll do it sooner than me, for you're more of a favourite above stairs, and I won't say but you have a cleverer knack at coming over people than I have."

"I think," said Patty, with a pleasant smile, "that you're learning to make very polite speeches, Becky. I suppose you have found out that's the way to come over me."

Rebecca gave her sister back a smile of affection.

With some difficulty Mrs. Baisley was persuaded to accept the self-denying generosity of the two sisters, and Nelly was not told by whose means such nice little hot dinners, neatly cooked by Dorothy, were provided for her every other day.

How could Mrs. Jenkins, with an income of more than two hundred a-year, see what was going on among her lodgers, and not give the aid she could so well afford? How could she know that the Hones, for Nelly's sake, were living half the week without the food to which they were accustomed, and which the health of the delicate Martha rendered needful, and yet never send the girl even the small remains of the nourishing dishes cooked for the sick Mr. Jenkins, even *when Dorothy often gave a broad hint how much*

good those fragments might do the little sick lodger in the second floor?

Oh, how truly is it said that the love of money is the root of all evil! There is no vice, perhaps, except drunkenness, that sooner makes the human heart as hard as iron. And for whom was this unhappy woman scraping and hoarding up money, year after year? Not for children or grandchildren: she had none. Not for near relations, for neither she nor her husband had any nearer than cousins, and they resided in a distant county, and the Jenkinses had long ceased to keep up any regular communication with them.

As long as Mr. Jenkins had retained his health and faculties, his wife had been constantly checked by him in her mean ways, and she could then only in secret indulge her avarice by petty savings; but now that he lay bedridden, and weak in body and mind, she had no one to control the lamentable vice, which of course increased by indulgence.

In the spirit of true Christian love had Mrs. Hone said all she could to Mrs. Jenkins, without giving offence and doing harm, on the subject of the use of money, and also lent her landlady an excellent little book on the same subject. This Mrs. Jenkins read, and professed to be much pleased with, yet its teaching made no lasting impression; yet still at times her conscience was not callous enough to escape many a twinge when she sent up to inquire civilly after Nelly's health, and saw the hollow cheeks and the feeble step of the invalid girl.

The meals which the Hones supplied were a

help to Nelly, but insufficient to strengthen her rapidly; and when at the end of ten days Mr. Price called to see her, he was greatly disappointed to find that she had not yet been able to leave her room even to go down to Martha's for a little change of air and scene.

And where all this time was the next door neighbour, Fanny's kind-hearted old grandmother? The very day before Nelly was seized with fever, Mrs. Reeve had been sent for to the City, her son's youngest children having taken at the same time measles and hooping-cough, and little Bessie, the youngest, being considered in danger. Here Mrs. Reeve remained for five weeks, and when she returned home to Islington, she brought Fanny and one of the little boys back with her.

It was a very fine sunny May evening when Mrs. Reeve arrived, and the air was so clear that even London itself looked clean. Right glad was the good old grandmother to find herself once more in her own quiet, snug little home, after all the turmoil of the City. Though her son's shop was in a court, the house unluckily stood within one door of that end of it which was nearest to a most noisy street in the heart of London, and added to the noise outside was the bustle of business within, and the incessant hooping of four children with violent cough.

"Well, Fanny, love," said the little fat old lady, settling herself down comfortably in a large easy chair by the window, "we've had a pretty hard month of bustle and nursing, and I'm uncommon thankful to get home to rest. Dear me, how nice everything does look, to be sure!

Hannah's a thorough good girl for cleaning, isn't she, Fan?"

"Yes, that she is," replied the granddaughter, looking round with great satisfaction at everything in the tidy sitting-room. "You don't want that looking-glass, Granny over the chimney: these tables would do just as well to dress your head in."

"Oh, here's old Spot," cried little Peter Reeve, as a handsome tabby cat made its way in, and ran up to welcome its mistress. The cat was followed by Hannah, the neat little maid, dressed all in her best, who came to inquire at what time her mistress and Miss Fanny would take their supper.

When this point was settled, Mrs. Reeve asked, "How are all our neighbours, Hannah? Is Mrs. Baisley's niece getting on nicely since you came up last to the city?"

"They say she's better, Ma'am," answered Hannah, "but I can't speak from myself, because I hav'n't been into next door a good bit."

"How comes that about, child? I thought you and Dorothy were fast friends when I went from home."

"So we are still, Ma'am, and I'll tell you all about it, please, another time," said Hannah, looking sideways at Peter, as much as to indicate she did not wish to speak further before him.

The fact was that one evening Mrs. Jenkins being attracted by the sound of eager conversation going on in her kitchen, chose to listen at the keyhole of the door, and like most other listeners, heard no good of herself. These words addressed by Mrs. Reeve's servant to her own were not soon forgotten by Mrs. Jenkins. "She's

a horrid, hard-hearted, stingy old miser, and if I was in your place I'd give warning before I was a day older."

Mrs. Jenkins' first impulse was to throw wide open the kitchen door, and turn Hannah out of the house without delay. The shame, however, of confessing she had been listening checked her, and she contented herself with desiring Dorothy the following morning never to permit Hannah to enter her premises again, as she had found reason to think very ill of her.

As it was now past seven o'clock, and Peter looked tired and sleepy, his grandmother gave him a light supper, and then Fanny took him up stairs to put him to bed. On her return Mrs. Reeve proposed that she should just run into Mrs. Jenkins's to inquire after Nelly, and take to her a small basket of new laid eggs which had been purposely brought from Mr. Reeve's shop for the sick girl.

"Give her my love," said the kind old granny "and say I'd have come in myself only I'm a dead tired, you know, to-night."

Fanny was delighted at the commission. She found Nelly lying on the Hones' sofa, and looking far more ill and altered than Fanny at first expected.

"Oh, how glad I am to see you," exclaimed Nelly, her pale face flushing with pleasure "but have *you* been ill too, Fanny, as well the little ones? You don't look so stout fresh as you used to."

"Don't I?" said Fanny laughing. "Nelly, that's only because I've had such a

pital at home, four little ones all in bed at once to wait on and to look after the last five weeks. Granny, and mother, and me, and old nurse Gray didn't know sometimes which way to turn; and as I was much the youngest of the nurses, you know, all the running up and down from the cellar to the garret came to my share; but I shall be sure to fatten up again very soon here, with granny's good living."

"You've not lost your spirits with your flesh, Fanny," remarked Rebecca Hone.

"It would be odd enough if I had, Miss Becky, now all's going on so well again at father's. There's even dear little Bessie able to sit up and play in her bed since Monday; and our doctor says they'll all be out and about soon, so you see I've enough to keep me in spirits."

"How thankful your mother must be," said Mrs. Hone, "that the dear little ones have all got over these troublesome complaints so safely, though they have had them so badly, I hear."

"Oh, yes, mother is so thankful, and father too, and I hope we all are," said Fanny, changing her merry tone to one more serious. "We were very near losing poor little Bessie. Father had her prayed for in church; and next Sunday they will return thanks for her. I'm sorry I shan't be at home to go to our own church to hear it."

"But you can be as thankful at church here at Islington, Fanny, as in the City," said Martha; "and when you hear those beautiful words, 'We give Thee most humble and hearty thanks for all Thy goodness and loving-kindness to us,' you will think of dear little Bessie's life being spared."

"Oh, Fanny!" exclaimed Nelly, "how very sad you would have been if she had died!"

"Yes," replied the young girl, with moist eyes; "the night when she lay senseless for hours, and I thought she would never wake up again, I felt as if my heart would break. But don't let us talk any more about this now," added Fanny, cheerfully. "See, here's a little basket of eggs Granny has sent you from father's shop. They came in all fresh from the Farm we deal with this morning, and I hope you'll like them. Granny says they're very good for you at breakfast, and when these are gone she'll send you in more."

Nelly begged Fanny to give her most grateful thanks to Mrs. Reeve for her kindness; and the Hones smiled at each other as if to say, "Now we shall get good help towards strengthening up poor Nelly."

"Don't you think, Mrs. Hone," asked Fanny, "that Nelly will soon be able to take short walks with me and Peter? Granny says I'm to have a week or two of whole holidays, to rest, before she'll let me go back home; so you see I shall have lots of time to take Nelly out, whenever her aunt likes her to go."

"That's just the very thing she wants," cried Becky, eagerly; "Dr. Price says she mustn't be cooped up indoors as soon as she finds her walking legs, and air is next to food. You'll come in every day, won't you, Fanny, to see whether Nelly's stout enough to walk with you?"

This proposal made Nelly's eyes look brighter than they had done for weeks. After another *quarter-of-an-hour* spent in cheerful conversation,

Fanny bade the Hones "good-night," and with a light heart returned to her grandmother, to whom she gave an account of Nelly's state.

During her grandchild's absence, Mrs. Reeve had learned all particulars of Nelly's severe illness from Hannah, of Mrs. Jenkins' meanness, and of the sacrifices the Hones were making. The kind old woman was touched by the tale. Having just been in the midst of sickness and suffering herself, she could feel the more strongly for others; and when she compared Nelly's poverty and desolate situation with the comfortable home of her darling grand-children, she determined she would do what she could to assist the fatherless girl.

The next day, accordingly, she herself made some good calf's-foot jelly, and sent it in the evening, with a bottle of wine, to Mrs. Baisley, with a message hoping that Miss Nelly would find these things do her good.

Hannah took the wine and jelly to the back entrance of Mrs. Jenkins' house, and it so happened that, Dorothy being out on an errand, Mrs. Jenkins was alone in the kitchen, and opened the door to Mrs. Reeve's servant.

We cannot deny that Hannah felt a malicious pleasure in delivering Mrs. Reeve's message to the stingy landlady, nor that Mrs. Jenkins looked both vexed and ashamed at hearing it.

"Put the things down on the dresser," said she, very uncivilly, "I suppose your missis can spare the mug till to-morrow. Mrs. Baisley's not at home. When my servant comes in, she'll tell her to fetch up the things. I'm glad," added she, almost spitefully, "that Mrs. Reeve seems

to be come in for a *fortune* since she's been away."

The sharp Hannah perfectly understood the meaning of this speech, and she replied, much more pertly than was proper—

"Oh, dear no, Mrs. Jenkins! it's just the other way. I should rather guess missis must be out of pocket with all the extras she's been so kind-hearted to pay for in the City for all them sick children,—oranges and grapes and all them sort of things, by the dozens."

"Well, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Jenkins, still more ill-temperedly. "More's the wonder, then, that she can afford jelly and wine for a stranger. For my share, I can't understand it."

"I daresay you can't," said Hannah, with a look so impertinent that Mrs. Jenkins being of a hasty temper, fell into a violent passion.

We will not repeat what was said on both sides. It is sufficient to say that both made use of language that was most unbecoming.

The quarrel perhaps would have gone on some time, had not Mrs. Hone luckily come down to fetch something from the kitchen. As she approached the door she was astonished to hear Hannah, in a loud and angry voice, say—"Don't talk to me of calling in the police, Mrs. Jenkins; if you do, I'll tell how you've been trying this fortnight past to take away my character and all that."

The moment Martha appeared there was a dead silence. She fixed her mild eyes on Hannah, and said, calmly, "You had better go home."

The servant instantly left the kitchen. She respected Mrs. Hone, and was ashamed that she

should have seen her in such a rage. The moment the girl had closed the door behind her, Mrs. Jenkins began, in a most excited state, to abuse her.

Martha listened in perfect silence for five minutes, not in the least comprehending what had been the cause of the quarrel. At length she said, quietly—

“I have always found Hannah a civil young woman; what could have provoked her to be so insolent, Mrs. Jenkins?”

This was a question Mrs. Jenkins found a difficulty in answering.

“Why, I only just happened to say,” cried the landlady, softening down, “that I wondered how Mrs. Reeve could be rich enough to send wine for presents, when out came Hannah with such impudence as you wouldn’t credit if you hadn’t heard it.”

The mystery was now quite cleared up to the mind of Mrs. Hone.

“Has Mrs. Reeve sent Nelly that wine?” asked she, looking at the bottle; “how kind of her!”

“Yes, and that mug of jelly. It’s only plain stuff, I see,” added she, contemptuously, “and can’t have cost much.” After pausing a few moments, she went on: “Mrs. Reeve has no sick old man to nurse and spend her money on; and I’m told her son’s got a capital business, and there’s sharp lads growing up to help in the shop; she’s not like me, as good as a lone woman, with nobody in the wide world to help her.”

Martha saw in a moment how Mrs. Jenkins was striving to cheat her own conscience. She was too good a Christian to assist her in the evil endeavour, and therefore said very gravely—

"The Reeves must be most hardworking and most careful people to be able to support, only from the profits of their business, such a very large family in comfort ; and I know from Fanny that instead of Mrs. Reeve being helped by her son, she is always helping him or his children, one way or the other. She is a good, charitable creature, who would rather pinch herself than see a fellow-creature want ; and she has got her reward already, for everybody that knows her well, loves her, and she's one of the most happy cheerful women in the world."

As she said this, Martha in her humility never recollected that the sacrifices Mrs. Reeve had made for others, were trifles compared with her own.

"Well, Mrs. Hone," cried Mrs. Jenkins, trying to look pleasant, "I'm sure I've heard you say that charity ought to begin at home."

"Yes, but I hope I said, too, that it ought not to end at home."

At this moment, very luckily, (as Mrs. Jenkins considered it,) Dorothy came in, and a stop was put to further conversation. Martha's remarks had not tended to make her landlady better satisfied with herself.

The slow recovery of her niece had caused Mrs. Baisley to feel so anxious that she received with real gratitude the presents of her benevolent old neighbour, and rejoiced to see the effect they had in improving Nelly's health. The short walks with Fanny were also beneficial to Nelly *both in body and mind.*

As soon as Mrs. Baisley saw that her niece *was gaining strength*, her anxiety was turned

into a new channel, and she began to fear that Nelly would fall back into her old habits of indolence.

"My dear," said she to her one morning, "I really think you ought to begin to do a little more work in the day, now you are able to sit up so many hours. It's a shame and a sin to be feeding on our neighbours, if we're able to get our own living; and I'm sure you'll be sorry to hear, Nelly, that I've been forced to let the good Hones take the bread out of their own mouths to help you."

Nelly had lately guessed as much, and it had given her pain. Now she determined to exert herself to the utmost, and never own she was tired as long as she could hold her needle. For hours this day, in spite of aching eyes and head, did Nelly work at her shirt-making, only resting for a few moments now and then when her fingers seemed to refuse to move.

After tea old Mrs. Reeve came in to pay her a visit, and while with her, Nelly, overcome by the too great exertion of the day, and the closeness of a damp mild spring evening, nearly fainted away, which convinced the kind old widow that the young girl had made much less progress in strength than Mrs. Baisley had led her to believe.



CHAPTER VIII.

It happened that two of the little Reeves still remained very sickly, and their medical attendant declared that they would not be better without a few weeks of good country air. Old Mrs. Reeve had therefore proposed to her son to engage a lodging at the Farm, a few miles north of London, from which his shop was supplied with butter and eggs, and to take Fanny with the two little invalids, Bessie and Sammy.

On returning to Fanny this evening, Mrs. Reeve told her of Nelly's fainting, and ended,—

“If I'd not had such a many pulls at my purse-strings lately, Fanny love, I'd have offered to take

poor Nelly to Shepherd's Farm with us. That aunt of hers is a good sort of a body in her way, but she doesn't know more about what's right for the sick, than the man in the moon. Only to think of her letting that skin and bone of a child sit stitching all this blessed day!"

"Oh, Granny!" exclaimed Fanny, "can't it be managed any how? Nelly would get well in no time; and oh, how she *would* like it! and how I should like it, for her to go!"

"That's nat'ral enough, Fan, but I'm afraid I can't afford it. If she went we should want another bed,—then there's the money for the coach to take her there and back."

Fanny looked disappointed for a moment: then, as if struck by a bright thought, she exclaimed:—

"Oh, Granny! father's promised me a new bonnet and a good shawl this summer for nursing the little ones through their measles. If he will give you the money instead, can't you manage to take Nelly?"

"You're a good child for thinking of it, but your out-doors things are very shabby, Fanny: you'll be badly off without a new shawl before the end of summer, won't you, dear?"

"Oh, never mind that. The one I wore last year can be washed, and then it will look tidy enough, you know."

The following day Fanny trotted off early to the butter-shop to consult her kind father, who was most willing to allow her to do as she pleased with the small sum he intended to spend upon her.

Then it was all settled that on the first of June, Mrs. Reeve, her three grand-children, and Nelly should all go together by coach to the pretty village in which Shepherd's Farm was situated.

Who can describe the pleasure felt by poor Nelly when her aunt consented to her going? If Mrs. Hone could have joined the party, her delight would have been unmixed: but there is no unmixed pleasure in this lower world, and it is well for us there is not.

Becky Hone, who was something of a milliner, begged Mrs. Baisley to allow her to alter Nelly's black bonnet, and also to make her up for Sundays a grey one of a piece of stuff she had by her. The Hones knew that Mrs. Reeve was one who noticed dress, and they set to work to make Nelly's appearance as like Fanny's as they could.

As to Mrs. Jenkins, she paid no attention to what was going on till the time came for Nelly's departure. Then, with great friendliness of manner, she bade her good-bye, with kind wishes for her perfect recovery, glad at heart to get rid of the sight of her wan face, and the reproaches of her own conscience as regarded the Hones.

The first of June was a brilliant day, and Mrs. Reeve and her little flock left Islington between five and six o'clock in the evening, and reached the Farm by a stage-coach in about an hour and-a-half.

The journey was not so charming as Nelly had expected, as little Bessie, who had never before been inside a stage, was sick and cross, and all Fanny's and Mrs. Reeve's attention was taken up by her. Sammy, also, was a little fidgety and

troublesome, and was frequently obliged to be found fault with for treading on Nelly's toes, and stretching over her to look out of window. When well, he was always the most difficult to manage of all Mr. Reeve's boys, and gave Fanny more trouble than all the other children put together.

Shepherd's Farm stood at one end of a pretty rural village, on the brow of a gentle hill sinking to the west. Opposite, and a little to the north of the Farm, was the church and neat churchyard, remarkable for several very fine old yews and ash-trees.

The house was built partly of wood and partly of brick, with very large old chimneys. Mrs. Reeve's sitting-room had once been the best farm-kitchen, but it was now papered and furnished as a parlour. It had two large casement windows, one looking west, first over a garden and then over sloping pasture-fields, and the other north, looking upon a very narrow slip of garden, and then on the road which led from the village, by the side of the churchyard palings down the slope of the hill. Over this large, though low, sitting-room, were two bedrooms, each containing a large and a small bed. Fanny and the children were to occupy the one room, and Mrs. Reeve and Nelly the other.

Everything about the house was very homely, but extremely clean; and the fresh pure air that came in through the western casement, brought with it the delicious scent of the garden flowers and of the wild-flowers in the fields beyond. Mrs. Reeve had frequently, in her husband's life-time, come down to this Farm from Saturday

to Monday on visits to the father of its present owner ; but Fanny had never seen the place before, and to a girl who had spent nearly her whole life in a narrow smoky court of London, Shepherd's Farm, and the beautiful country round it, looked indeed like a paradise.

She had not, however, time to see much this evening, for there were all the little bundles and boxes to undo ; the children to be fed and washed, and undressed and put to bed, while granny stowed away into a large cupboard all the little articles of grocery, &c., which she had thought it economical to bring with her, rather than to buy at the village shop.

Nelly entreated to be allowed to assist, but the old lady said, "No, no, child ! you look as red as a turkey-cock already with the heat of the coach ; so sit you down on that broad window seat yonder and, keep cool till Fan comes down, and then we'll have a good dish of tea, with nice new milk and eggs. You've come here to play, Nelly, and not to work, till you've got a pair of roses in your cheeks that won't come and go."

Nelly sat down as she was desired, and looked out on the road. Presently a shepherd with a large flock went by. The poor sheep looked very tired, and panted under the weight of their thick heavy fleeces. As they reached the churchyard palings, some of them began to crop the fresh tender blades of grass on the turf which grew at the edge of the road, others began to lie down under the trees which grew close to the palings of the churchyard ; and the shepherd seating himself on a stone near the farm gate,

seemed waiting patiently, as Nelly fancied, while his weary sheep took a little rest.

Though Nelly knew nothing about pictures, she felt that the scene before her was a sweet one. It was nearly sunset, and there was a golden light upon the glittering ivy that covered the top of the church tower. The gentle wind quietly waved the branches of the trees opposite to the window, and their shadows played here and there upon the green graves beneath the church tower.

Nelly, though much fatigued, felt very, very happy. She thought of the conversation she had once had with Mrs. Hone about the good Shepherd; and knew that it was He who had raised up for her so many kind friends in her time of need.

Just as all sunshine vanished, and twilight spread over the whole church, Fanny came tripping down full of delight at the wonderful cleanliness of everything in the rooms above. "Why, Granny," she cried, laughing, "I thought nothing made of wood could be whiter than your floors at Islington, but now I've found out my mistake; and would you believe it, Mrs. Clay says, 'the white curtains at my window have been up months?' I thought they'd been washed last week—they are as white as snow."

The little party retired very early to bed; the young girls full of schemes for the morrow. Nelly did not forget in her prayers this night, to offer up thanks for all the great kindness she had received, and to pray especially for a blessing on Mrs. Reeve.

This was, we see, a happy beginning to Nelly's visit; but, on the morrow a change took place. For several following days the weather was wet and gloomy. The little ones were unwell and fretful; and Nelly, who had never been used to the worry of children, felt quite worn out with their noise. Mrs. Reeve and Fanny were of course much taken up in trying to amuse the young things; and we must own with sorrow, that Nelly often most unjustly considered herself neglected by her kind friends. The truth was, that for the last few months the Hones had become so fond of the girl, that she had been the first object in their thoughts; and, during her illness, Nelly had felt that she could almost look up to Martha as one who watched her with a mother's eye. Now that she was but a secondary, not a first object of care, the selfishness of human nature showed itself in her heart, and made her feel disappointed and unhappy in the midst of so many comforts.

Mrs. Reeve, one evening, perceiving Nelly to be languid and out of spirits, and thinking the children wearied her, kindly advised her to take a book, and go and lie down up-stairs on her own little bed, where she could be quite quiet.

She did lie down; but instead of reading she fell fast asleep, and never awoke till Fanny touched her gently and told her supper was ready. "I would not call you before," said the good-natured girl, "because I wanted to get those squeaking little chicks out of your way before you came down; they are both in bed *and fast* as tops by this time, so now we shall

have an hour or two of peace with dear old Granny."

"How could I think they were not kind?" said Nelly to herself, with deep self-reproach. "How wicked and unthankful I have been!"

When she went down, Mrs. Reeve said, "You musn't think, Nelly, that little Sam and Bess are always such Turks as they've been the last few days. I daresay you know by yourself, how cross one is when one's not the right thing; and you'll see Bessie a duck of a child when she gets stout again. And mind, you musn't stand on manners with us, dear, but slip off to the upper room whenever the chicks are too much for you."

Tears rose to Nelly's eyes. Fanny saw them, and began to talk merrily to her grandmother about future plans when the fine weather returned. One of these was to go gipseying, and have tea in a little wood, half a mile from Shepherd's Farm; a place of which Mrs. Reeve had often spoken.

We all know that bad weather during a short holiday in the country, is a trial even to grown-up persons; and there are few of us who cannot accuse ourselves of having murmured at it, as if we had not known Who it is that ruleth the sunshine and the rain.

To all the young people now at Shepherd's Farm, the trial was no small one. To be surrounded by pleasant fields and pretty lanes, and yet to be confined to one sitting-room. To look out and see the wet drip, drip, all day long from the trees in the churchyard, and the cart ruts in

the road filled with little streams running down the hill, and many beautiful flowers in the garden completely spoilt, and all the view towards the west hidden by a thick mist. This was trying.

Fanny laughed, and said, "It would be better for the children to be at home; for there, even in pouring rain, there was always something alive in the court to be seen out of window; while here there was nothing moving, but a bird now and then darting by like a flash of lightning."

Yet, in spite of all this moisture, the air at the farm was very much healthier than that of London; and in three or four days Mrs. Reeve began to find an amazing increase in the children's appetites, and some improvement in their looks.

The first of June was on a Tuesday. On the following Saturday the sun again made its appearance occasionally; and Fanny, not being an invalid, went out several times for a few minutes between the heavy showers, and brought in most charming accounts of the beauty of the village, and of a lane on the further side of the church, whose banks were quite heaped with flowers.

"It's very naughty rain not to go away," cried little Bessie. "Why doesn't it leave off, Granny?"

"I am sure it has rained long enough," remarked Sammy, ill-humouredly. "It never rains all the week long in the City like this. I can't abear the nasty country, Granny,—I want to go home. When shall I go back to Peter and Charley? I'm tired of playing with Bess."

"Oh!" said Fanny, kindly; "I think it's sure

to be fine to-morrow, Sammy, and then you'll see *such* pretty things that you have never seen before, and you'll not wish to go home."

"But won't it be Sunday?—and then Granny and you will go to church, and then we shan't have you to take us out; and I don't like to be left with Nelly: she won't never play with us and tell us stories like you do,—and I don't love her a bit, Fanny, that I don't!"

"You naughty boy!" exclaimed the old widow. "How dare you talk so rude? I've a good mind to turn you neck and heels out of the room."

"Pray don't be angry with him, Ma'am," said Nelly, colouring. "He hasn't said what is not true." Then turning to the boy, she added gently, "If I stay with you and Bessie to-morrow, instead of going to church, Sammy, I'll try to please you as Fanny does, if I can."

Sunday was a cloudless day. The earth shone as bright as the sky. After so much rain not a grain of dust was to be seen anywhere. Every leaf looked perfect in form and colour,—for hitherto it had been a spring without blight. The air was filled with the songs of larks, thrushes, and blackbirds, and every now and then the sudden note of a cuckoo was added to the concert. The flowers still moist from the wet of the preceding days, gave out their sweetest scents, and raised their glittering heads in the sunshine.

Old granny and her young party had all past an excellent night,—the children not having coughed once. Every one was in excellent

spirits; and the little *white widow* had a tinge of colour in her cheeks, that gave Mrs. Reeve the sincerest pleasure. A pleasure, oh how much greater than that of Mrs. Jenkins at the sight of the twenty sovereigns, which she this fine Sabbath morning hid in a safe place before she went out to church!

"Well Fanny, love," said Mrs. Reeve, at breakfast, "shouldn't we be thankful for this change; and now, dear, how shall we manage about going to church? Mr. Clay tells me, 'the strangers' seats are near a wall, that's dampish after much wet;' so I can't be letting Nelly go to catch cold: and Mr. Clay says, he can get us a nice dry pew in the afternoon, that belongs to a friend that lives five miles off, and only comes to morning service. But which of us two shall go this morning, Fan?"

"Can't I take care of the little ones, Mrs. Reeve?" asked Nelly, timidly; "and then you can both go."

Nelly felt it was right to make this offer; though in her heart she was very much afraid of being left alone with the wilful Master Sammy, especially after his last evening's speech.

"I'm afraid the children would tease and worrit you," said Mrs. Reeve. "What do you think, Fanny?"

"We shan't be gone two hours," observed the young girl, "as church is only a step across the way, if Nelly doesn't mind being left."

There was, perhaps, a little bit of selfishness in this proposal of Fanny, yet it was mixed with a better feeling.

For the last three weeks, as we know, she had been very much with Nelly, and had become aware how childish and helpless she was in many things for her age; and as Sammy was in one of his very best moods this morning, Fanny thought it might be a good thing to leave Nelly to take charge of him and Bessie; and thus convince her young friend that she had the power of acting a little by herself if it were necessary. Accordingly it was so settled; and before the service, Mrs. Reeve proposed that all the young people should go out for a short walk, lest the fineness of the weather should not last the whole day.

In almost all parts of the village the footpath was raised, and the soil being a dry one, the walking was generally good. How much did the girls enjoy that first stroll, though they had a little difficulty in keeping Sammy and Bessie, after their week's imprisonment, from shouting and gamboling about the roads, and racing after birds and butterflies.

The sight of the children of a large Sunday School, all in perfect order, on their way to Church, had more effect in quieting the little Reeves than Fanny's commanding voice, and Nelly's gentle reproofs.

"Oh! what a many little boys and girls," cried Bessie, opening wide her pretty brown eyes.

"Yes, dear," said her sister, "and see how nicely they walk, two by two. There's many not much bigger than you, Bessie. You see *they are going to Church.*"

"*Let's walk behind them,*" said Sammy, "and

see them go into Church. There's as many boys as girls. How straight they walk—like soldiers! I wonder where they all come from."

Fanny and Nelly were equally surprised at the number of the scholars. They did not yet know that the village was a very scattered one, and contained a large number of inhabitants, living in different small hamlets.

Fanny was much struck by the neat and cleanly appearance of the children, and more still by the number of respectable young men and women, who appeared to be their teachers.

"How I should like to teach in a Sunday School!" cried Fanny. "It would be doing good to the poor, and it would not require money, which father can't spare me to give away."

"I think I should like it too," observed Nelly, "if I could be taught first how to teach. I'm sure, Fanny, you would be a very good teacher, because you've had such plenty of teaching at home; but I don't know a bit how to teach, and I should always be afraid of not telling the children right."

"You're quick enough, Nelly, and you'd soon get into the way of it," said Fanny.

Had Mrs. Hone been with the young friends, she would have said, "Every Sunday School teacher who prays earnestly for help to do her duty, will receive help from on high."

The little party, after watching all the school quietly enter the pretty Church porch, went home into the farm-house, where they found *Mrs. Reeve*, and Mr. and Mrs. Clay, just ready to come out to cross the road to the Church.

"Now Sammy," said Fanny, "mind you are a very good boy, and do all that Nelly tells you; and don't tease Bessie, there's a dear."

"And then," added Mrs. Reeve, "you shall have a nice pudding for dinner, and a cake I made for you yesterday, for tea."

Sammy was a greedy child, and neither his mother nor sister ever rewarded or punished him by means of food, knowing that this would be likely to increase his greediness. Fanny was, therefore, sorry that her grandmother had said this. It could not, however, now be helped, and she only determined she would take some opportunity to mention to Mrs. Reeve, in a respectful manner, her mother's opinion.

The Church bell had ceased to ring. The churchyard, which had been crowded with people, was now empty. Two or three gentlemen's carriages, and several farmer's gigs, and taxed carts, had now all driven away out of sight; and Sammy and Bessie, who had been kneeling up at the north window of the farmhouse parlour, watching the Church-goers, now got down from the window seat.

"What shall we do?" asked the boy, coming up to Nelly; "you said you'd play with us."

Mrs. Hone had kindly lent Nelly her book of coloured Scripture prints, to take to the country, thinking that they might amuse Mrs. Reeve's little grandchildren. These prints had been the gift of Miss Rice, and for her sake Martha valued them very much. This Nelly knew, and it made her very careful of them.

Could she have found any other amusement

this morning for the children, she would not have brought out these prints.

"Come here, dears," said she, "and I will show you some beautiful pictures."

"Oh! thank you," cried Bessie, climbing on Nelly's knee, and throwing her little arms round her neck, just as she often did round Fanny's. Nelly hugged her close, and gave her several warm kisses, saying, "So you love me now a little bit, Bessie; don't you, duckie?"

"Oh yes, a great great bit," said the loving child; "but not quite such a great bit as I love Fanny."

Nelly now put Sammy on her right hand, and Bessie on her left, and opening the book, began to show them the prints, explaining the objects in them really very nicely, and in a style to interest young children.

All went on very smoothly for a time, till Sammy, becoming impatient, because Bessie wished to look at each picture much longer than he did, insisted on Nelly turning over the leaves more quickly. The timid girl, afraid of contention, complied. Sammy saw his advantage, and next demanded to turn over for himself. Had the book been her own, she would have instantly allowed this also, but as it was Mrs. Hone's she refused, upon which Sammy, much out of temper, exclaimed,

"I won't look no more at those ugly old pictures; I've got a much better book than that up-stairs, Nelly, and I'll get it down, and you and Bess shan't see none of the pretty painted pictures in it, that you shan't."

Nelly felt relieved at this speech, as she was half afraid the wilful child, when she refused to comply with his wish, would have made a snatch at Mrs. Hone's prints. She went on amusing little Bessie, whose innocent questions and remarks so engaged her whole attention, that she did not notice for some time how long Sammy had been fetching his book from the bedroom above.

At last she looked round, and wondering he had not returned, she ran to the door and called him. No Sammy answered. "Come, Bessie," said she, "and let us look for brother." They hastened up-stairs, but no Sammy was in their rooms. Poor Nelly began to be terribly frightened. She ran down to the kitchen to ask Mrs. Clay's servant if she had seen the boy. The kitchen was empty, and the door in it leading to the farm-yard stood wide open. Holding Bessie by the hand Nelly hastened out, and there, at the other end of the yard, stood Sammy, close to a pond. He was amusing himself with throwing small stones at a number of ducks and ducklings in the water.

The rain of the last week had made the yard like a quagmire, and Nelly dared not venture across it, so she called and entreated the boy to come in. He only laughed at her fear and distress, and to make things worse, little Bessie began to sob and cry loudly, being frightened by Nelly's terrified manner. The edge of the pond where the boy stood, was wet and slippery, and Sammy, in order to take good aim at a fine drake, was leaning forward over the water. "Oh, he'll be in! he'll be in!" screamed Bessie.

and Nelly, loosing the little girl's hand, was about to rush over the mud and wet straw, to drag Sammy away from the pond, when luckily, Mr. Clay's farming man suddenly appeared from an out-house, and catching hold of the boy's arm, exclaimed, in a gruff voice, "Hollo, I say young master, what are you at, a bothering master's ducks? be off to your sisters, and don't show your face here again, or I promise you Mr. Clay shall find you locked up in the coal-hole when he comes home from church."

It was Sammy's turn now to be in a fright, and he scampered over the mire back to the kitchen door to Nelly. His entrance, however, into the house, was stopped by Sarah, the servant girl, who said, very angrily, "Look at your feet, you bad boy. Do you think I'm a going to let you bring that mud and mire into the house on a Sunday, when all's rubbed up clean? Off with your boots, I say, and I'll fetch your shoes." Sammy instantly obeyed, and right glad was poor Nelly when she got him and Bessie safe back into the parlour again. But her troubles were not yet quite over, for Sammy soon began—"Don't tell Fanny and Granny about the ducks, Nelly, and I'll mind what you say another time, indeed I will."

The girl knew not what to answer, so afraid was she of putting Sam out of temper. In an impatient tone he repeated, "Don't tell them, I say."

"*But,*" said Nelly, in a very gentle voice, "*they'll be sure to ask whether you've been a good boy, and then I must tell the truth.*"

"Why must you?" cried the boy, angrily. "I'll give you a good thump if you won't promise not to tell, see if I don't." And saying this, he raised his fist.

Nelly jumped up, saying, "I'll go and call the man to you we saw in the yard." Before she could reach the door of the room Sammy was there before her, drew the bolt, and planted his back against the lock, exclaiming, "Now you can't get out!"

"Oh Sammy, how naughty you are!" said Bessie, quite distressed.

Nelly took the child on her knee, and whispered, "Let him alone—don't speak to him, dear—he can't hurt us out there."

In about ten minutes after wheels were heard in the road, and Sam, forgetting his naughtiness, ran to the window to see the carriages drive up to the churchyard gate, and the people come out of church. As soon as he saw Mrs. Reeve and Fanny leaving the porch, he turned round hastily to Nelly, and begged with tears in his eyes, that she would not tell of his conduct. He then ran to unbolt the door, and his grandmother and sister came in. Nelly half hoped that no questions would be asked. She thought Sammy was sorry for his fault, and she was very unwilling he should be punished. Of course, inquiries were made, and Mrs. Reeve, on hearing Nelly's account, declared that Sammy had lost both his pudding at dinner, and cake at tea, upon which the child burst into so loud a roar, that Mr. Clay, who was in the garden, put his head through the open window, and said sternly

would not allow such a bellowing in his house on a Sunday.

The first part of dinner passed silently, but when the pudding appeared, big tears began to fall not only from Sammy's eyes, but from Bessie's also. She was a tender-hearted little soul, and could not bear to see her brother unhappy. Nelly was also far from comfortable, accusing herself for having permitted Sammy to leave her sight, and thus get into mischief; and Mrs. Reeve and Fanny feeling vexed that they had unwisely left the timid Nelly in charge of a boy likely to give her trouble by his disobedience, and the boy in the care of one who could not manage him. Though the cold dinner was good, and there was plenty of it, no one of the little party enjoyed it thoroughly.

In the afternoon Mrs. Reeve proposed that Fanny and Nelly should attend the service, which the latter was delighted to do. She had not been to Church since her illness, and she was glad to think she could now join with others in prayer and thanksgiving to Him who had shown her such great mercies.

Among all the elder Sunday scholars in the village, there were not two girls more neat in their appearance than Elinor Mercer and Fanny Reeve. They were both dressed just as the daughters of respectable small shopkeepers ought to dress. Nelly in her simple grey bonnet, and plain black shawl, and Fanny in a straw bonnet, *with straw-coloured ribbons, and a light shawl, with a dark border.* Both bonnet and shawl *had been well cleaned, and looked very tidy, and*

Fanny, as she had put them on, had said to herself, "I'd rather have Nelly's company than a new bonnet and shawl."

Nelly was very much pleased with the church. It reminded her of one near her native town. The sermon this afternoon was addressed particularly to the young people belonging to the schools. The language of the clergyman was so very plain, that girls much younger than Nelly and Fanny could understand every word of the discourse. The young friends were much struck with many parts of it. So well did the clergyman describe all the faults and failings of early youth, that there were scarcely any attentive young hearers in that little congregation, who might not have fancied the minister was especially addressing them.

One point was particularly noticed by Fanny. The ideas were new to her. It was this: "My dear young friends," said the clergyman, "I believe there are very few of you who would not do all you could to save a school-fellow who was in bodily danger. If one of your companions, for example, were falling into fire, or water, you would rush forward in an instant, even at your own risk, to hold them back. Oh that I could say you would be equally eager to save your schoolmates, if you saw them falling into something much more dangerous than fire and water, even into sin, which will as surely destroy the soul, as fire the body! Look well every one of you into your own hearts, and say if you might not, even *during the last week*, have checked evil words and evil doings; and so, with God's help, have

saved your brethren from sin. Then again, I believe, there are very few among you, who, if they saw a school-fellow suffering from sickness and pain, would not feel pity for them, and try to help them, if it lay in their power. Oh that I could see the same pity shown by you for the sickness and weakness of the soul ! Those who are strong should bear with the weak. Those who have little to struggle with in their own temper should feel a tender pity for those whose trial in temper is great. Ask yourselves, Are you not all far more apt to treat your brother's infirmity of temper with anger, or with mockery, rather than with tender pity. My dear young friends, can we call ourselves true disciples of Our Blessed Lord, and yet not love our brethren ? And can we love our brethren, and not endeavour to keep them from sin, and not pray to bear their burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ ?"

As the good clergyman said these words, Fanny's conscience whispered, "What pity have I ever felt for poor Sammy ? I've been vexed at him a hundred times, but I've never given a thought what a plague his bad temper must be to himself as well as to me. Poor child ! it must be so hard for him to be good, compared with the rest of the little ones at home, who were born more sweet-tempered than he was." And then followed a silent prayer that she might remember the words she had just heard.

Tea was on the table when the girls returned from afternoon service, and Mrs. Reeve and her little grandchildren were ready to sit down

to it. Sammy, as he took his place, looked wistfully on the plate of cakes, which he knew he was not to share, and his eyes filled again with tears. The moment little Bessie was helped to a cake, she turned to her grandmother, and, in the prettiest manner possible, begged she might give it to her brother Sammy.

"You dear little thing," cried Nelly, giving the child a kiss, "if Sammy may have yours, you shall have mine, darling."

"Oh no, that won't do," said Mrs. Reeve; "what do you say, Fanny, love?"

"Why you know, Granny, you told us you had made us a cake a piece, and I don't think it would be wrong for us three to give Sammy a part of what's our own, though he mustn't have what was made for him."

"There, get down, Sammy, and kiss your kind little sister," said the good old grandmother, "and thank Nelly and Fanny, and now let's have no more dismal wry faces." And there were no more dismal faces that evening, and granny and her small family, after tea, enjoyed a ramble in the fields beyond the church, and Nelly, having lived so many years in the country, was able to teach the Reeves the names of many a pretty wild shrub and flower.



CHAPTER IX

MONDAY was as brilliant a day as Sunday, and Mrs. Clay, the farmer's wife, who was very good-natured, took the young people all about the farm. The little Reeves were afterwards much amused in seeing a quantity of butter and eggs packed up to be sent to their father's shop. Then there was milking time, and seeing the milk put into the large tin cans to send off in a cart to London. Then exploring rambles in the fields, and searching for all the best wild flowers to make large nosegays to bring home for dear old Granny.

This was a happy day, even to Sammy, and

at night Mrs. Reeve rubbing her hands with delight, declared as she looked at her four charges, that all the strengthening physic at Potticary's Hall wouldn't have done them half as much good as the quantity of clean air they'd swallowed all that day long out of doors.

And as the weak ones grew stronger, they were able to extend their walks; and it was a great pleasure to Fanny and Nelly to find out to what places all the pathways in the meadows led. The flowery lane on the further side of the churchyard opened into a large field sloping down towards the west. Under a tree in the hedge, at the upper part of this field, was a wooden seat, which commanded a very charming view.

This seat was a favourite spot with all, especially in the evening, as the sunset was so beautifully seen from it. What a contrast was the life poor Nelly was now leading from that she had led with her aunt and an old deaf woman in the dark close court in the City!

Before the close of the second week she felt in better health and spirits than she had ever done since she left Rillington; and had it not been for the tiresome quarrelsome Sammy she would not now have had one thing to lessen her enjoyment at Shepherd's farm.

Mrs. Baisley, hearing of Nelly's improvement, wrote directly to beg Mrs. Reeve to send her home with the first person who was coming up to town from the farm, as, if her niece no longer needed country air she could not bear to encroach further on Mrs. Reeve's kindness.

Many were the lamentations among the young

Reeves on hearing this letter ; and Bessie, catching hold of her grandmother's apron, cried, "Don't let her go, Granny ; pray, don't let poor Nelly go !"

"No, duckie ! I don't mean Nelly to go till we do, if her aunt will give her leave to stay. You must write to-day to her, Nelly, and ask her."

There was now a shout of joy from the children, and it would be hard to say whether Fanny or Nelly was the most pleased at Mrs. Reeve's kindness.

Mrs. Clay, who happened to be present, observed "that haymaking would soon begin, and she hoped Mrs. Reeve would be able to remain at the farm long enough for the young ones to enjoy a good game in the hay ;" and looking at the children she ended, "I expect, too, next week, there will be a school feast at the park, and I shouldn't wonder if we get invited to take you all with us to it, for the ladies at the park deal with us, and Miss Caroline asked me only yesterday all about you."

"What shall we get at a school-feast ?" asked Sammy, whose thoughts turned directly to cakes and sweets of all kinds.

"Oh, such famous games, and such numbers to play at them," replied Mrs. Clay ; "and there are girls of all ages, Fanny, and there will be some of the young Sunday school teachers there who are tradesmen's daughters like you."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," exclaimed Fanny, "for I should be afraid to talk only to ladies. Were you ever at school-feasts when you lived in the country, Nelly ; and did you like them ?"

The girl grew like crimson, and answered quickly, "I should have liked them if I hadn't been a foolish child then."

Fanny saw the subject was painful, and said no more. The allusion to the school-feast had recalled to Nelly's mind the image of her mother, dressed in a bright silk-gown and expensive shawl, leading her by the hand away from the poor but merry children at a school-treat, and scolding her for wishing to play with what she called a parcel of vulgar brats, who were not fit to dust the shoes of such a pretty nice drest child as she was.

The aunt's answer was anxiously expected at Shepherd's Farm. It soon came with permission for Nelly to stay, provided she gave up four or five hours daily to the needlework Mrs. Baisley was going to send her from the Hones.

Old Mrs. Reeve thought it very cruel that poor Nelly should not be allowed one month's holiday after working so hard for two or three years without any cessation; but she knew Mrs. Baisley's character too well from Martha Hone to attempt to oppose her.

The work was brought down by Fanny's mother, who came to the farm for one night to see her children, and to exchange Sammy for Peter, an exchange highly pleasant to Nelly, for Peter was a quiet tractable little fellow, and the best friends in the world with Bessie.

The delight all the Reeves expressed on seeing their fond mother after their short but as yet their *longest* absence from her brought many and many a *sad* recollection to poor Nelly.

"Oh," thought she, "if my mother had been like Fanny's, how I should have loved her, and what a happy home I might have had! How dreadful it is to think that I'm ashamed to speak of my own mother! Oh, how I wish I knew if she is sorry for her wickedness! I wonder if aunt knows anything about her. If she does, she'll never tell me, I'm sure. She hates to think of her, I know; and I should never dare to ask her anything about her."

Had Mrs. Hone been present at that meeting she would have soon seen and perhaps understood Nelly's sad looks. The Reeves, taken up with their own feelings, did not observe them, and Nelly was for many reasons glad they did not.

And now another ten days of fine weather passed most pleasantly. The school-feast gave great satisfaction to high and low, rich and poor, and hay-making began. The hours Nelly was obliged to spend in needle-work only added more zest to the hours of play.

Nelly rose early that she might get an hour and-a-half at her needle before breakfast. Then in the heat of the day she and Fanny would sit in a shady arbour covered with woodbine; and while she worked Fanny read aloud, while the two little ones played under some large trees. Peter was a steady little man, and needed no watching like Sammy.

But now the time drew near for leaving the sweet country for the smoky town. When, a day or two before the month was out, Mrs. Reeve had a letter forwarded to her from Islington. It was written by a distant cousin who

lived in Durham, and contained a request that Mrs. Reeve would find her some lodgings in her own neighbourhood. This cousin's only son was afflicted with a lameness that no medical man in the country had been able to cure, and his mother wished to bring him to London to consult some eminent surgeon.

As Mrs. Reeve read the letter she thought struck her that her cousin was well able to pay the same weekly sum for lodgings which Mr. Clay asked for his at the farm; and if her cousin took the Islington house, there was no reason why the country lodging should not be retained for the time her relation was obliged to remain in town.

And it was all so settled, and Granny went home to see all was straight, and to put her maid in a way to make her cousins comfortable. And the day after she went, who should come up in the evening to Clay's front gate with a basket in her hand, but Mrs. Hone.

Luckily the young people were just come in from a walk. We need not say which of them was most delighted to see her.

Nelly, for a moment, could hardly speak from surprise and pleasure; and Mrs. Hone was perfectly astonished at the change a month had made in her young friend's appearance. She was no longer the little white widow;—her eyes were bright and clear, her cheeks rounded, her complexion healthy, and much tanned by being so constantly in the open air. She was also a *little grown*, and much less thin in figure.

"Was it not very kind of your grandmother

to ask me to come down in her place for three or four days?" said Mrs. Hone to Fanny. "It's such a treat, for I have not been into the country for years and years."

"And it's such a treat for me," cried Nelly, looking at Martha most affectionately.

"And what message has Mrs. Baisley sent about Nelly?" asked Fanny eagerly.

Martha smiled, and replied "Your grandmother and Becky and I have persuaded her to let you keep her a little longer here, and to excuse her needlework for two days."

"Oh, thank you; thank you!" exclaimed the grateful girl. "It's all your doing, Mrs. Hone; I'm sure it is. Nobody can persuade aunt as you can."

"Come," said Fanny, with a little air of importance, "we must get Mrs. Hone something to eat." Fanny felt just then like the young mistress of a house receiving her first visitor. "Nelly, I'm sure you'll put the little ones to bed while I order in the tea."

Nelly was but too happy to be of use. She had been accustomed to assist Fanny with the children, and both Peter and Bessie had become fond of her.

She was a little tempted to-night to hurry over the washing of the children, and not to hear them repeat their hymns as well as say their little prayers; but she resisted the temptation, and went down to her dear Mrs. Hone with a clear conscience.

"What a sweet place this is!" said Martha, turning her face to the window; "and how nice

to be so near the church, and Mrs. Reeve says there is such an excellent clergyman here. I am so glad I shall spend Sunday with you ; it must be so quiet in this pretty village on the Sunday, just what the Sunday ought to be everywhere."

Here the girls began one after another to describe the church and the schools, and the beauties of the neighbourhood, and the feast, where they had enjoyed themselves so much.

Martha, as she drank her tea, listened with the greatest interest to all these details ; for she was equally ready to rejoice with those who rejoice, as to weep with them that weep.

The evening was quite as fine as the one on which the Reeves arrived at Shepherd's Farm. The garden flowers smelt as sweetly, but the scent of the wild ones was now exchanged for the smell of hay.

Martha Hone dearly loved the country, and the early lessons of Miss Rice had opened her mind to see God in his glorious works, as well as in his holy Word. Her heart this evening was filled with gratitude for being allowed once more to look upon such a lovely scene as that from the western window of Shepherd's Farm.

When Nelly and she retired to rest, Martha said, "I hope, dear child, you are thankful for having got so well again, and for all the happy days you have spent since you came here."

"I pray to be thankful," said Nelly, humbly ; "I never felt so strong and so happy in my whole life before ; no, never !"

"Is this place prettier than the country about Billington ?"

"No, I don't think it is, for there's no beautiful little river here, and not such big woods."

"And yet," said Mrs. Hone, "you have enjoyed this place much more, I think, than you did the country about your home."

"Oh, yes, for I'd no Fanny Reeve there?"

"And besides, as you told me once, you were a cross spoiled child then; and all spoiled children are selfish and miserable."

"Yes, I was often very miserable, though I had everything I cried for, if it cost ever so much."

"Is there no other reason," asked Mrs. Hone, "but Fanny's company, that makes you happier here than at Rillington?"

"I hope there is," answered Nelly, seriously. "I hope I am learning to think more of good things and all you have taught me."

Mrs. Hone kissed her, and they read a chapter from the Bible together before they went to bed.

Nelly was much inclined to take this opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Hone of her mother before she closed her eyes to sleep. She longed to know whether her best friend would think it right for her to ask her aunt if her mother had ever been heard of; but a feeling of shame prevented Nelly from talking about her wretched parent; and she also felt an unwillingness to give pain to Mrs. Hone by a tale of sin and misery, just as she was going to sleep in cheerfulness and peace.

Nelly was beginning to think of others as well as of herself!

The next morning early she jumped out of bed

as soon as she awoke, to look out at the weather. Alas ! though it did not rain, the whole sky was covered with clouds, and by breakfast time a steady rain began to fall.

The disappointment of the young girls was very great, for it was Saturday, and Mrs. Hone was to leave on Tuesday morning, and there would, as they said, only be Monday for any little excursion ; and Peter and Bessie lamented that the hay would get wet, and they should not be able to make houses and nests in it again.

In short, all faces but Mrs. Hone's were very long and doleful. " Come, dears," said she, " it's wrong to be vexed about the rain, because it is God who sends it. If we can't be happy out of doors, why can't we be happy in ? Suppose you get your needlework, Nelly, and I'll help you with it. It's no pleasure to me to sit doing nothing."

" But," said Fanny, rather hastily, " Nelly has no call to work at all to-day, or Monday ; you said so, Ma'am, last night."

" Yes, my dear, but I thought, if we put down the hours we both work to-day, I could tell Mrs. Baisley of it, and Nelly could have that time for herself some fine day next week,"

" Oh, that will be nice !" cried Fanny ; " and as I've nothing to mend this week for the chicks, I'll help Nelly too." So all three sat down to their needle, and Bessie and Peter amused themselves with making a make-believe butter shop, of all sorts of odds and ends upon one of the broad window seats of the sitting-room.

The rain ceased before one, and the rest of

the day was clear, warm, and delightful, *and the children took Mrs. Hone all round about the village, and to the sunset-seat, and she was quite as much charmed with everything as they expected she would be.*

And on Sunday little Bessie begged hard to go to church in the morning, for the first time ; and behaved there very quietly, and seemed so little tired, that Fanny ventured to take her again in the afternoon. Thus none of the little party were kept at home. The little ones before they had the hooping-cough, had been accustomed to attend the afternoon service in town.

The sermon in the morning was on this text, " Herein is love ; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

After service, Mrs. Hone remarked to Fanny and Nelly, with what clearness the minister had shown how love *must* lead to the performance of every duty. How parents, acting on this principle, would bring up their children in the ways of holiness and peace. How children would obey, honour and succour their parents. How brothers and sisters would strive to help one another. How just and kind masters would be to their servants ; and how obedient and faithful servants would be to their masters.

" I have heard my father say," observed Fanny, " that some people may love their neighbour without loving God ; but nobody *can* love God without loving their neighbour. The sermon to-day made me think of this very often,

Mrs. Hone, and now I understand quite why it is."

"And I think I do too," said Nelly; "for as the clergyman said, if we love God, we shall obey Him, and He tells us to love one another."

This was a happy Sunday to all the visitors at Shepherd's Farm. In the evening, Mrs. Hone and the young Reeves and Nelly, went into their favourite fields. The sunset was glorious. The whole western sky was covered with clouds, like small waves, of the brightest crimson, edged with gold. Mrs. Hone and Nelly sat watching them long after Fanny had taken the two tired little ones home to bed. Martha enjoyed the peaceful scene with a grateful heart. No sounds were to be heard but the last evening notes of the day-singing birds, and the first notes of a nightingale, perched very near the sunset-seat, in a fine hedgerow-tree.

When Martha and her young friend at length returned through the churchyard path to the Farm, the clear summer moon shone on the small casement windows of the church, and spread a soft light on the beautiful ash which shadowed the graves on the north side of the churchyard. As Martha passed the tombstones near the path, these words, engraved in large letters, on one of white marble, caught her eye, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." How blessed, thought she, to believe these precious words, to trust in that Saviour, who will raise us up in the last day! There is nothing sad in a *Christian's* grave.

Nelly interrupted her train of thought, by

observing, "I should like, when I die, to be buried in such a place as this. It's so pretty and so still."

"And yet not lonely," said Mrs. Hone : "but it does not matter, dear child, where our bodies are buried, so that our souls are safe ; and yet I can't help saying too, though perhaps it's foolish, that I would rather lie here than in a London burial-ground."

Mrs. Hone and Nelly did not know how many of the learned and good have felt the same kind of wish. The Christian perchance has had the desire of a peaceful resting-place increased by the hope, that those nearest and dearest whom he leaves behind, will visit his quiet grave, and there learn to reflect on the vanity of all earthly things, and the value of the immortal soul.

On Monday, Mr. Clay good-naturedly arranged to give his lodgers and their friend a nice drive to a distant village, in a spring-cart, which he borrowed from a neighbour, and thus Mrs. Hone saw more of the country than she expected. Her last evening was spent in the hay-fields, where all the young ones were as busy as bees, raking behind the carts. Even little Bessie had learned to manage a small rake handily.

When undressing for bed this night, Martha said to Nelly, kindly, but earnestly—"I am afraid, dear, you spoil Bessie a good deal."

The young girl looked up astonished, and exclaimed, "How can I, Ma'am ? she is such a good little thing. She hardly ever wants anything she ought not to have, and she does as she's bid almost always directly."

"And yet you spoil her, Nelly, by petting her too much, and praising her too much, and never letting her try to do anything for herself. When she was at play with her doll on Saturday, you ran to help her to dress it, even before she asked you, and put down your work four or five times to do other things for her.

"I did not know *that* would spoil her," said Nelly, who was not at all convinced that Mrs. Hone was right, for Bessie was very unlike the spoiled child she herself had been."

"Don't you see, my dear child, that when little Bessie goes home, there will be nobody there who will have time to wait upon her, and coax her, and make as much of her as you do here?"

"But she is such a darling," cried Nelly, "and I do love her so, and I do so like to please her. I never had a little brother or sister of my own, you know, Ma'am, and it's so nice to pet such a dear, good little thing."

"Yes it is. I know it is. But if you really love the child, think, Nelly, how sorry you would be to see her grow idle and peevish, from your spoiling her. I am half afraid you have done her some harm since you've been with her, for she seems to me a little more selfish than she used to be, though she's still a sweet little thing."

Nelly looked very sorry. She felt it would be very difficult and disagreeable to take less notice of Bessie than she had hitherto done, and she did not quite see what Mrs. Hone saw. At last she observed timidly—

"I don't think, Ma'am, that Mrs. Reeve or Fanny think I have spoiled little Bessie."

"Very likely not," said Martha, kindly; "people who always live with children don't see their faults so much as strangers. Now, Nelly, just recollect, if you can, how Bessie behaved two or three weeks ago, and watch to-morrow and see if she doesn't seem to want more notice and waiting upon than then, and to expect to be praised for being good."

The recollection of one or two little circumstances now began to make Nelly think Mrs. Hone might be right.

"Remember, my dear child," added Martha, "that if your petting does Bessie harm, you love yourself, and not her, if you go on with it. Don't look so sad, Nelly. I don't think there's *much* mischief done yet. I only say this to warn you, in case you stay a few weeks longer with the Reeves."

"It will be very hard to change," sighed Nelly. "Must I never nurse her and kiss her any more?"

"Oh dear, yes," replied Martha, smiling, "if you'll only leave off praising her twenty times a day, and doing things for her she can do for herself. I wish too you would take more notice of poor little Peter; it's not quite good for either of the children, that one should be put so much before the other."

"Peter is such a stupid boy," said Nelly; and she was about to add, and he's so ugly, but she felt Mrs. Hone would not like such a reason for *not* noticing an amiable child.

"If he is stupid," observed Martha, "he wants more help than his quick little sister."

"I can't like him, Ma'am, as I like Bessie," said Nelly.

"No, I daresay not; yet that must not hinder you from being as kind to him. You know, dear child, how very good all the Reeves have been to you, and I'm sure it would make you very sorry, indeed, Nelly, to find that your visit to them had done the little ones any harm."

Nelly had a grateful heart. These words touched her. She gave a promise to her friend to follow her advice with regard to the little Reeves; and she kept it after Mrs. Hone left.

For a day or two little Bessie seemed quite surprised, and almost discontented, that Nelly did not devote herself so entirely as before to her amusement; and this completely opened the young girl's eyes to the wisdom of Mrs. Hone's counsel.

The end of July was come. Mrs. Reeve's cousins had left Islington, and the kind grandmother, after taking Fanny, Bessie and Peter home, all in blooming health, to their parents, returned to her own snug little house with Nelly.

Mrs. Baisley received her niece very kindly. She was truly glad to see her looking so strong, and not a little pleased to observe how much she had lost her striking likeness to her mother. The fuller face, and healthy sunburnt skin, were not alone the cause of this change, for from this time Nelly's features altered extremely, and she lost all the prettiness of her childhood.

Yet in Mrs. Hone's opinion, she was far better looking at fifteen, than when she first became inmate at Mrs. Jenkins's. Her melancholy, contented expression, was exchanged for one of cheerfulness, modesty, and sense.

The next half-year passed over the lodge without anything remarkable happening. One of Nelly's rewards, when she had been particularly industrious, and had got beforehand with her work, was to go and spend a day or two at Mr. Reeve's. These visits were most useful to her in very many ways. They roused her to bodily exertion. They taught her household affairs, and enlivened her spirits—and besides, they showed her how religion may be the first object, even in a house full of business. Never did Mr. Reeve neglect family prayer in the morning, however busy he might be. Nor did he neglect it at night, however wearied with the labour of the day.

No family could be better brought up than the Reeves, and God had hitherto blessed his parents in their children. The two eldest children were now so useful in the shop, that their father required no other help; and we know what Fanny was to her mother.



CHAPTER X.

OWARDS the spring of the next year, Rebecca one, who, as we have said, had always been very healthy person, was attacked with violent cold, which brought on a dangerous inflammation of the eyes. Mr. Price attended her for a week or two, but finding his remedies had little effect, he advised her strongly to see some clever oculist. She did so, and was told she must not use her eyes for months, and keep them as much as possible from light. She was so told, that she must live well, and keep herself quiet as she could in mind, as all nervous excitement would retard her recovery. Here was,

indeed, a trial for both the sisters, and a severe one. Rebecca was the quicker needlewoman of the two, and for months she would be able to earn nothing. Mrs. Baisley, mindful of all the Hones had done for Nelly, was most anxious to offer help. Alas ! this very Easter she was unexpectedly informed, her services were no longer wanted at the school. Thus she had no employment, but in assisting Nelly, who still worked for Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Jenkins, more grasping than ever, seeing the state of things, would have been very uneasy about her rent, had she not known that both her lodgers had some good furniture, which she was convinced they would turn into money rather than contract debts.

It was a weary time for Rebecca, sitting all day in a dark corner of the room, with a large shade over her eyes, almost unable to see anything, and giving way to constant impatience and repinings.

Though Mrs. Baisley was, of course, now always at home, she offered for Nelly to be as much with the Hones as they pleased, that she might assist Martha in waiting on Rebecca. Willingly would the girl have read aloud, to amuse the poor blind woman ; but time was too precious, for well as Mrs. Smith paid her workwomen compared with many others, Nelly was obliged to work diligently the greater part of the day, in order to support herself and help her aunt. Mercy, however, attended this trial of the Hones ; and for the hundredth time in Martha bless the memory of her early benefac-

tress. As she taught Nelly by word of mouth many a lesson she had learned from Miss Rice, she perceived by degrees that Becky became more and more interested in listening to subjects that hitherto had given her no pleasure, but rather the contrary.

There were days when Rebecca was quite free from pain, and would give her whole attention to the passages of Scripture or to the hymns which Nelly repeated to Mrs. Hone as they sat at work. It was a great relief to have something to listen to; and the interest which Becky really felt in her sister's pupil made her find amusement in watching for the answers which Nelly would give to questions from Martha, which appeared to Rebecca very difficult ones.

As our readers no doubt are aware, long as they had lived together, Martha had been able to teach her sister very little, because, though, strange to say, jealous of Patty's superior knowledge, Rebecca would never condescend to learn from her.

Now, no proud, no jealous feeling, stood in the way of improvement, and the instruction given to Elinor Mercer sank, with God's blessing, into the heart of Rebecca Hone.

Day by day did many a home truth fall from the lips of Martha, making the more impression on Rebecca, as she was well convinced that her good sister had no intention of preaching and dictating to her under the pretence of teaching Nelly.

The lessons of Mrs. Hone were not confined to religious instruction only. She encouraged her

young friend to talk of God's works as well as of his word; and it was a great delight to Nelly to hear what Mrs. Hone could tell her of trees and flowers, and, above all, of foreign countries. Then sometimes Nelly would cheer the sisters by singing, and her sweet clear voice gave Rebecca, who was extremely fond of music, great pleasure.

And was not Nelly happy to be able to be of use and comfort to those who had been so good to her? She was; though at times she still selfishly repined that her home was not like that of Fanny Reeve, and thought it hard she should be condemned to so dull and monotonous a life, when her young friend had constant change, and the cheerful society of brothers and sisters.

What human being is not at times tempted by envious and discontented thoughts! and oh, how wretched is the lot of those who do not know how to pray and struggle against them!

Nelly did both pray and strive to be content, and (as Mrs. Hone had taught her) to feel that, had it been best for her, God would have given her a home like that of Fanny.

Little improvement took place in the state of poor Rebecca's eyes for three months, and the frequent half-guinea fees paid to the oculist and the cost of medicines had consumed much more than the sum Martha had put aside for the rent and other expenses at midsummer. One evening, when her sister was gone very early to bed, Martha sat alone considering what would be best to do in order to raise money. The idea of pawning some of her goods first came into her mind, but *was instantly checked by the remembrance of*

the promise she and Rebecca had given their father on his dying bed, never to enter a pawn-broker's shop. Next came the thought of selling out of the funds. The old friend who had always managed her little business for her had lately died, and she knew not whom to consult on this subject till she recollected Mr. Reeve, with whom she was now intimate.

As it was a fine summer evening, she determined to go at once to the City, and ask the advice of Fanny's father. He strongly opposed her idea of lessening her little capital, and kindly offered to lend her the money she required, without interest.

"You are very good, and I am very thankful to you, Mr. Reeve," said Martha; "but I understand enough of business to know even a few pounds are of value in such a trade as yours. Besides, there's no hope of my sister being able to work for weeks to come, so I shall be forced to take some money out of the bank by-and-by, if I don't do it now."

"Hav'n't I heard my girl say," observed Mr. Reeve, "that you've some plate and things by you, not much in use? If you'd like to part with them, I know an honest, fair dealing tradesman, who'll give you their worth any day. It's a bit of a fancy of mine, Mrs. Hone, to set my face against keeping things one don't want. It's a waste of interest on the money they'd fetch, and does no good to anybody, that I see."

Martha coloured, and replied,—“I've got rid of almost all I had of that sort excepting a watch, which has been put by for years, for it was much

too handsome for a poor needlewoman like me to wear. I'll think of what you've said, Mr. Reeve, and if I make up my mind to part with it, I shall take it very kind of you to send me to an honest dealer, who will give me its value."

Mrs. Hone, as soon as she returned home, unlocked the drawer, and opened a box in which she kept the watch. It was a plain gold one, the work of a superior maker, and had a good gold chain attached to it, and one red cornelian seal, upon which was engraved the name of "William."

Tears filled the eyes of Martha Hone as she looked at it. The watch had belonged to her lover, William Mason, and had been given to him by a gentleman whose young son he had saved from drowning. It had been William's very last gift to poor Martha. The whole scene of that gift came back to her mind as clearly as if it had passed a few months before, although more than thirty years had since glided by.

"It is of no use to me," said Martha to herself; "yet I cannot bear to part with it, unless I'd no other way of paying my just debts. It's not worth more than twenty-five pounds at most, chain and all; and if I sold out five-and-twenty from the bank, it wouldn't make a pound a-year less in the interest I get. Oh, how I wish I knew what *he* would have thought right for me to do in such a case as this! Would he have agreed with Mr. Reeve? Yet, why need I care so much for his watch, when I have the Bible he used till his last day, full of his own dear *handwriting*? How short perhaps the time may

be now before we shall meet again in heaven ! It isn't worth while, then, to grieve at parting with such a trifling thing as this, and it shall go."

As she said this, she began to unfasten the seal from the chain, and as she did so, the tears which had gathered in her eyes fell upon it.

Rebecca did not know for months that Martha had parted with her lover's watch and chain, and had only kept the seal. Whenever she asked questions about money, Patty always told her playfully that she should see all the accounts as soon as ever her eyes got well enough.

At length, a slow but gradual improvement began to take place. All suffering was over, and Becky felt she could bear any moderate degree of light without inconvenience. The opinion of her doctor was on the whole favourable as to the perfect restoration of her eyes to a healthy condition, though he expressed a fear to Martha that her sister might never again, without great hazard, be able to use them at needlework for many hours together.

On first hearing this opinion, Mrs. Hone was for a few moments cast down, and anxious thoughts for the future filled her mind. Soon, however, all care was cast aside, and Martha could throw herself, her sister, and every concern of life, into the hands of her heavenly Father. She could trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to provide all those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.

This long season of discomfort and forced idleness had been greatly blessed to Rebecca

Hone, for light had sprung up in her soul during the time of bodily darkness. The sins of years past all rose up before her: those of discontent, ill-temper, and of ingratitude towards her excellent sister, were the first that deeply troubled her.

"Ah," thought she, "what months and months of health, and strength, and good eye-sight, God gave me, and yet I was never content, fretted myself to death about all sorts of nonsense, and never gave a thought of all the good things I was getting day after day, if I couldn't have everything my own way! and oh, how I've vexed and worried dear Patty over and over again! If she hadn't had the patience of Job, she could never have put up with all my shameful behaviour to her. My temper was enough to provoke a saint; and Patty must be next door to one, to have been as quiet with me as she has. As sure as I am alive, if she'd been in my place, and I in hers, I should have twitted her a thousand times, if she had vexed me, with all the money and things I'd given her; but dear Patty has never once called even her bank-money her own. One would think poor William Mason had left it us both to share and share alike. If God gives me back my health and sight, I'll try hard to be a better sister to her: but why should I wait for that? oughtn't I to begin directly? With God's help, I may be more loving and thankful to Patty, and patient, though I may not be able to work to keep myself or her for a long while, perhaps."

Such was the first dawn of light that shone *into the mind of Rebecca Hone*; and, with the

grace of God, the light increased, and a deeper and deeper conviction of sin led her on anxiously to seek after and to love that Saviour who had died to save her from sin. Now, old things were passing away, and all things were becoming new. Not that the change was sudden: on the contrary, it took place by degrees, and weeks and weeks elapsed before Martha had the great consolation of seeing that her sister was becoming a Christian indeed.

In spite of worse outward circumstances, we may surely with truth say, that Mrs. Jenkins's lodgers had never before enjoyed the peace of mind and comfort in each other which they now did.

Mrs. Baisley no longer treated her niece with harshness, and was more willing to see and own all that was good in Nelly's character. Still, the young girl could not love her as she did Mrs. Hone, though some real affection had sprung up in her heart for the sister of the father who had been so dear to her. Had Nelly been less timid, and Mrs. Baisley of a nature less cold and reserved, the niece would have loved the aunt affectionately.



CHAPTER XI.

SEVERAL letters during the last year had arrived from John Mercer, giving a fair report of his proceedings, and containing many kind expressions of the strong interest he took in Nelly's improvement and welfare. About the same time that Rebecca was decidedly recovering the use of her eyes, Mrs. Baisley received from him the welcome gift of five pounds, and she at once determined that a part of the sum should immediately be spent in purchasing for the good Hones a gown apiece, of which they now stood greatly in need.

To give Nelly pleasure, her aunt allowed her *to take the present to Martha and Becky.* It

was with some difficulty the sisters could be persuaded to accept the gift.

"Your aunt," said Mrs. Hone, "wants a new dress quite as much as we do, Nelly. I wish, my dear, she had kept the money for herself and you."

"Oh, there's four pounds left," cried Nelly, smiling; "and you know, Ma'am, aunt and me can earn much more a-week than we used: and aunt says poor Miss Rebecca's illness has made Mrs. Smith give us many and many a good job of work, that we never should have got if she'd been able to do it. You know, Miss Becky, this is true; so do, pray do, take aunt's present," added Nelly, giving Rebecca a kiss.

"Well, dear child, we will. And now run up-stairs, and ask your aunt to come down, that we may thank her as we ought."

We need not repeat all that was said by Mrs. Jenkins's lodgers that morning in the Hones' sitting-room, nor the friendly feelings with which they separated at dinner-time.

The recollection of that last day they ever all met together at Islington, brought much comfort to the sisters and Nelly.

That very evening Mrs. Baisley had work to carry home to Mrs. Smith, and as Nelly had been out on errands for Mrs. Hone all the afternoon, her aunt did not take her with her, as she usually did.

Before leaving the house, Mrs. Baisley said to Nelly, "I may, perhaps, be later home than usual to-night, my dear, as I am going to our old lodgings, to see Mrs. Leeson. If the Hones like, you can stay with them till I come in."

It was nearly ten o'clock, and Nelly began to wonder her aunt did not return, especially as Mrs. Baisley well knew the Hones went to bed at that hour. Half-past ten struck by Martha's clock on the chimney-piece, and Nelly jumped up, saying, "I'm sure, Miss Becky, you are quite tired and want to go to bed; and I ought to go away."

Though Nelly said this in a quiet tone, it was easy to see she was extremely alarmed at not seeing her aunt appear.

"No, stay," cried Martha, putting her hand on Nelly's arm: "we must not frighten ourselves, my dear; but something must have happened to keep your aunt at Mrs. Leeson's. Perhaps her old friend has been taken suddenly ill, and your aunt has nobody she can send to tell you she means to remain with her all night. I'll go down directly, before Mrs. Jenkins settles for the night, and ask her to be so good as to send Dorothy out to see if she can find Beck's boy, to go to the City for us."

The boy was found in bed, and fast asleep; but his mother soon roused him up, and sent him off, before eleven, to the dark court where Mrs. Leeson lived. Martha then persuaded her sister to go to bed, promising to let her know as soon as the boy returned; and Nelly remained alone with Mrs. Hone.

An hour and a half of most painful suspense passed. Every sound in the street made poor Nelly start up to the window. At last the young lad came back, with a message from Mrs. Leeson, *that she had seen nothing of Mrs. Baisley for some weeks.*

Martha had taken the precaution to desire the boy, if he heard no news of Mrs. Baisley at Mrs. Leeson's, to go to the linen-warehouse. He had done so, and Mrs. Smith had sent a note to Mrs. Hone, to inform her that Mrs. Baisley had left her, in apparently good health, at half-past eight, with a small parcel of new work.

On hearing all this, Nelly turned as pale as death, and exclaimed, "Oh, what can have become of her?—where can we send to?—what can we do now?"

"Nothing more, dear child, to-night," said Martha, calmly, though she trembled, and her face was as white as Nelly's.

The boy being paid and dismissed, Martha hastened for a few moments into her bedroom, to speak to her sister; and when she returned, Nelly threw her arms round her, and burst into a violent flood of tears.

"Hope for the best, dear child," said her tender friend, pressing the poor girl to her bosom. "Now is the time to trust. Wherever your dear aunt may be now, Nelly, she is still as much in God's care as if she was here."

"She must have met with some dreadful accident—she must be killed," sobbed Nelly, "or else by this time she must have sent for us. Oh, Mrs. Hone, what shall I do?—what will become of me?—what shall I do?"

"Try to be quiet, dear Nelly, and listen to me." Though tears, as she said this, filled Martha's eyes, her voice was firm; and Nelly, checking her sobs, listened.

"I never have once deceived you, Nelly, and

never will. I am afraid some very bad accident has happened; but I have known several cases where people have been stunned for hours, and have then come to themselves, and done well. Before to-morrow morning, we may be sent for, or your aunt may be brought home, perhaps not even much hurt."

"But if she's brought home——?" Nelly could not say the word—dead.

"Why, then, please God to spare us, Rebecca and I will be your aunts," said Martha, putting her arms affectionately round Nelly.

Nelly could not speak a word; her heart was too full of feelings not to be described.

"Now, dear, we will not undress, but you shall lie down outside Rebecca's bed, and I will stay here on the sofa; so that, if we are wanted, we shall be ready in a moment to get up."

No one in the house but Dorothy and old Mrs. Jenkins had more than snatches of sleep that night.

Between seven and eight the following morning, a messenger from one of the large city hospitals arrived, to say that Mrs. Baisley had been brought in the preceding evening, before nine o'clock, in a state of insensibility, having been knocked down and run over by a cart; that she had just recovered her senses, but was too much injured to allow of her removal, and that fears were entertained that she could not live many days.

And the opinion of the house-surgeon proved *correct*; but we will not describe every sad visit of Mrs. Hone and Nelly to the hospital, nor the

death-bed of Mrs. Baisley. Suffice it to say, that the exemplary chaplain of the institution spoke in terms of confidence and comfort of the poor patient to Mrs. Hone.

After her second visit, Mrs. Baisley begged that Martha would come the next time without Nelly, as she wished for a private conversation with her.

The sufferer was that day revived a little, and when Mrs. Hone remarked that she looked stronger, Mrs. Baisley replied, devoutly,—

“Thank God, I am; and I hope I shall have breath to say all I wish. Oh, Mrs. Hone, there’s one thing that lies heavy on my conscience. I see you’re thinking of what I was to Nelly when we first came to be fellow-lodgers. No; it’s not that. I ought, perhaps, to have felt more for her, poor child, than I did,—spoilt as she’d been; but I thought I was doing my duty by her, and the thing that lies so heavy on my conscience is not about Nelly, but about her poor miserable mother. Oh, Mrs. Hone, how one’s thoughts change about other’s sins, when one knows one lies on a death-bed, and must soon have to give an account of one’s own! Six weeks ago, that poor creature wrote me a letter, to tell me she was dying of deep decline; that she repented her wickedness, and entreated me to forgive all the misery and disgrace she had brought upon my brother and his family; and, with words that ought to have melted a heart of stone, she begged to hear something of her child. You, Mrs. Hone, who are so good, will hardly believe me, when I tell you that I threw that letter into the fire. She wrote again, a fortnight ago, to say she

could not last long, and entreating again for pardon, and to hear of Nelly."

Here Mrs. Baisley stopped, overcome by her feelings; and Martha, in the kindest tone, said:

"Tell me what to say, and I will write as soon as ever I get home; and it will be in time for the post to-day."

Mrs. Baisley made a strong effort to command herself, and exclaimed,—“Tell her I forgive her from the bottom of my heart, even as I hope and trust myself to be forgiven; and oh, Mrs. Hone, beg her earnestly to forgive me my great sin towards her—my leaving her to live a life of guilt without making one effort to draw her from it. I need not tell you what to say of Nelly. Thank God! there, indeed, you can give comfort to the poor dying mother. The good clergyman who is visiting Anne Mercer added a few lines to her last letter. If she is now too weak to write, he, I am sure, will answer yours. Pray for me, Mrs. Hone, that the pardon I send may not be too late. And now good-bye, and may God bless you for ever and ever, for all the kindness you have shown to poor Nelly.”

The chaplain of the hospital came to see Mrs. Baisley just as Martha left her, and she told him all that had passed between them, and how pride had been her besetting sin, and how she now mourned over the unforgiving spirit which had filled her breast for years. “And all the time,” said she, with unfeigned humility, “I thought myself a Christian. Oh, how miserably I deceived myself in thinking so!”

“Be thankful,” exclaimed the good chaplain,

"that, by God's mercy, your eyes have been opened, before it was too late, to see and repent of your sin. You can now, I trust, say you are in perfect love and charity with all men?"

"I can," replied Mrs. Baisley, fervently.

Martha's letter was not too late. The reply was written, not by Mrs. Mercer, but by the rector of the parish in which she was residing. It was as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. BAISLEY,—The message of forgiveness you have sent by your Christian friend has given inexpressible consolation to your dying sister-in-law. If ever there were a true penitent, she is one. She has long seen her guilt in its true light. Hers is no death-bed repentance—while still in health and strength she had begun, by God's grace, to turn from her evil ways. She forgives you and prays for you daily, and thanks you with the deepest gratitude for the care you have taken of her child. She is most grieved to hear you are so dangerously ill, but still trusts that your Heavenly Father may raise you up again; but, if not, she says she looks forward to meet you in a better world, through the merits of that Redeemer's precious blood which was shed for sinners. To her child she sends her fondest love, and asks her prayers, and pardon for all her wrongs towards her. To your Christian friend she sends her warmest thanks, and prays that God may pour his best blessings upon her and her good sister, and that Eleanor Mercer may repay all their Christian kindness, by being the support and comfort of their old age."

We cannot describe the peace which this letter gave to the heart of Mrs. Baisley. Every care was now removed; for the Hones had given promise that as long as they had a home of their own, Nelly should share it, until her brother could receive her into his.

Mrs. Baisley survived her sister-in-law a week only. Her last days were without bodily suffering, and her faith in the atonement of her blessed Lord so strong, that she could look at her approaching death without fear. Nelly and the Hones were with her when she died.

It was the day after the funeral, and Martha and the young orphan were sitting alone. Nelly was weeping, and her friend endeavouring to comfort her, as only one who is a Christian can comfort.

"I don't know how it is, Aunt Martha," cried Nelly, sobbing, "but I can't help being so very sorry that I did not ask you to beg poor aunt to tell me if she knew what was become of mother. Now I shall never, never know."

"Dear child, I can tell you all about her."

"Oh, where is she?—and has she repented?" asked Nelly, eagerly.

"Yes, she began to see her great sin many months past; but your aunt did not know this until a fortnight ago."

"And why didn't poor aunt tell me? O Mrs. Hone, didn't she forgive poor mother?" asked Nelly, with a most painful expression of face.

"She forgave her from the bottom of her

heart," said Martha, soothingly. "I wrote to your mother for her. Your poor aunt was afraid, dear child, to talk to you on this subject, because it was so trying to her: she left it all to me to tell you, as soon as you could bear it. Make yourself happy, Nelly; your mother will never fall into sin again."

Though Martha struggled to speak calmly, the tone of her voice betrayed her feelings, and Nelly exclaimed, "Mother is gone too!"

"Yes, dear Nelly; gone where there is no more sin, and no more sorrow. Thank God, Nelly, for all the mercies God has shown your mother."

The orphan was deeply affected, but not for long. We must recollect how many years she had been entirely separated from her parent. After the first burst of natural feeling, great was the comfort Nelly felt in hearing from Martha every particular of her aunt's communication with Mrs. Mercer, and in reading the good rector's letter. Nelly did fervently thank God for the mercies he had shown her mother.

What a change had one short month made already in the situation of one of the inmates at Mrs. Jenkins's! and more change was at hand. But we must first describe Nelly's worldly affairs.

By the kind management of Mr. Reeve, the funeral expenses were small, and after all was settled, Nelly was found to be mistress of two pounds in money, besides the furniture and wearing apparel which Mrs. Baisley had left her.

Mrs. Hone took the first opportunity of consulting her landlady about the room Mrs. Baisley had occupied ; and Mrs. Jenkins making a pretence of showing kindness to the young orphan, proposed that nothing should be done about Nelly's furniture for the present, and that for a few weeks no rent should be expected from her.

The truth was, that Mr. Jenkins was sinking very fast, and his wife, always on the watch to make money, looked forward to the plan of letting her own sitting-room and the upper bedroom together, allowing poor Nelly a trifle weekly for the use of her furniture.

About a fortnight after this time, Rebecca came home one evening looking as if she had much on her mind.

"Patty," said she, "you'll be surprised to hear that Mrs. Kean at Mrs. Smith's is going to be married very soon."

"Is she?" replied Martha, wondering what great interest this marriage could have for Becky.

"You know, sister," continued Rebecca, "that I'm never likely to be the needlewoman again I used to be"—she hesitated a moment and looked up at her good sister—"and I've asked Mrs. Smith to let me have Mrs. Kean's place."

"What made you do so, Becky?" asked Martha hastily. "And what did she say?"

"She said she'd think about it," replied Becky. "That she didn't see why I should not do, as I was active and managing, and a good cutter out."

"But," said Mrs. Hone quickly, "you would have to live at the warehouse, Becky."

Rebecca covered her face with her handkerchief, "Yes," replied she in an unsteady voice, "I should have to leave you, Patty."

"Oh, no, you must not, dear. We shall do very well if we're careful, and if we can't stay here we'll get a cheaper lodging. I can't part with you, Patty."

"Aunt Becky," exclaimed Nelly, warmly, "I'll work to help you day and night if you won't go. We are all so happy together; then there's the money dear brother John will send me. You shall have every shilling of it to make up for your not being able to work as you used to do. Oh, we shall do very well, as aunt Martha says. You must not go. We can't spare you, dear aunty; indeed we can't."

The affection and gratitude of Nelly touched both sisters. They were beginning to find sweet reward for all they had done for the girl.

"Well," said Becky, wiping her eyes and speaking more cheerfully, "the thing's not settled. Perhaps after all Mrs. Smith will not take me."

The Hones had never been separated for more than a few weeks at a time since they were born. The idea of parting was most painful to both, yet Rebecca seemed to see that it was her duty to secure if possible a situation exactly suited to her present state of health.

We have said that Martha was some years older than her sister. Rebecca knew that as age drew on Martha's gains must decrease, and now that she herself was unable to work for more

than a few hours in the day, she saw that the time would soon come when her sister would be constantly obliged to take money from the bank, and thus lessen the interest which was her sole certain income.

The wages Mrs. Smith had given Mrs. Kean, Becky knew would be much more than sufficient to provide clothing, and it was a consoling thought to Rebecca in the midst of her grief, that by taking this place at the warehouse, she should not only take off all Martha's present burdens, but be saving for herself.

What an altered being was Rebecca Hone ! A year ago she was a thoroughly selfish, thankless woman. Now, by the grace of God, she had come out of the furnace of affliction a new creature.

The struggle of parting from Martha would have been still greater had it not been for Nelly. We hardly know whether Rebecca could have made up her mind to leave her sister quite alone. Now the case was indeed changed. The young orphan would be as an adopted child to Martha, and every year become a more suitable companion for her.

Mrs. Smith decided to accept Rebecca's services, and in spite of Martha and Nelly's entreaties to try how they could all manage to get on together for six months longer, Becky determined to go. She was a person of strong will, and now was as firm in doing what she believed right as she had often formerly been in doing wrong.

"Dear Patty," said she, "what would be the use of my waiting six months longer? If I

waited for six years, ten to one I should never hear of such a place as this again. It seems just sent on purpose for me now. There's no needle-work required, and nothing I can't undertake with a clear conscience. Don't try, dear, to turn me from it. It's of no use."

Very, very sad was the parting between the sisters, and desolate for many a week looked the two rooms to Martha without Rebecca. She missed her every hour of the day, but she strove for Nelly's sake not to give way to low spirits, and the poor girl was still depressed by all she had gone through the last few weeks.

"Aunt Patty," said she one day sighing, "what a sad world this is. As soon as ever one gets a little happy, something comes all of a sudden and makes one all sad again. Just as poor aunt began to be good to me, and I began to love her, she was taken away from me; and now," added Nelly, her eyes filling with tears, "now dear aunt Becky and we were all getting so comfortable together, she's obliged to go. Isn't it a sad world?"

"It would be, Nelly, a very, very sad world indeed, if we did not know that everything that happens to us is sent by God. You must not be like a little child, Nelly, who thinks his doctor very unkind because he gives him bitter medicine. The child can't understand that the physician is to do him good, and that he can't get well without it; but you can understand, Nelly, that all the troubles you have ever had were sent to make you a better girl; and don't you feel, dear child, that they have done you good?"

"A little," replied Nelly, sadly; "but oh, how I wish I could be contented like you, aunt Patty!"

"I am obliged to pray daily against discontent," said Mrs. Hone, humbly. "You can't tell, child, what it has cost me to reconcile myself to part with the only relation I have in the world, just at the very moment we began to be happier together than we have ever been."

"You won't be angry, will you, if I ask if you think it was quite right of Aunt Becky to go when you wanted her so much to stay?"

"I think, Nelly, she was right, because she believed she was doing her duty; and I love her better than ever, for she is gone for my sake."

"I don't think it's a good thought," remarked Nelly, "but it will come now and then into my mind, that it's a pity Mrs. Jenkins should have such plenty of money that she does not want, and you have so little when you want it so much."

Martha smiled, and said, "We will not judge our neighbours, Nelly; only just tell me, would you like me to change places, if I could, with our landlady?"

"Oh, no," answered the girl warmly, "she can't be half as happy with all her money as you."

"Then never again wish me richer than I am."

Rebecca had not left Islington three weeks when Mr. Jenkins died, and shortly after the funeral, his widow offered to deduct from Mrs. Hone's rent the small portion which Nelly contributed towards it, on condition that the girl *should not* remove her furniture.

Before agreeing to this, Martha consulted her good friend Mr. Reeve, who at his own expense sent a competent person to look at Nelly's goods, and to say what Mrs. Jenkins ought to pay for their use. It was more than Mrs. Jenkins had hoped to give, but as she had the prospect of letting the rooms immediately, and to an eligible lodger, she made no objection, and Nelly had thus a small sum coming in quarterly.

The bargain was an advantage to both parties.

We will only say of the new lodger, Mrs. Campbell, that she was neither a comfort nor discomfort to Mrs. Hone and her adopted niece. She was a person of good birth, who had met with great reverses, and being as proud as she was poor, had sought a cheap lodging in a very obscure part of London, where she was never likely to meet with those who had known her in prosperity.

Finding her fellow-lodgers were humble needlewomen, she never deigned to take the slightest notice of them. During the summer she was generally absent two or three months, and at Christmas and Midsummer was generally visited for a few weeks by an orphan cousin, a beautiful girl whom the misfortunes of the family had obliged to become a governess.

Rebecca found her new life much what she had expected, and soon gave satisfaction to her employer, Mrs. Smith, who kindly allowed her to go to Islington of an evening whenever she could spare her.

On Sunday the sisters met at church, then Becky came home with Martha and Nelly, and

they dined and drank tea together, and then went again to the evening service.

And thus things went on with few changes for three or four years, and Nelly was now a young woman of nineteen, and an excellent sempstress, and with occasional help from brother John, she was able to assist her kind friend, and to persuade her that there was now no necessity for such constant toil. Nor indeed was there.

About this time came a letter to Nelly from John, telling her he had a comfortable home to offer her, and begging she would come to him with some friends of his who would be returning in a few months from London to America, and who would arrange everything for her voyage, and take the greatest care of her.

Nelly put the letter without speaking a word into Martha's hand. She read it, and for a few minutes the friends wept together. At length Nelly said,—

“Why should I go? John has done well enough without me all this time. I don't want a better home than this. Aunt Martha, you've been a mother to me, I will never leave you unless you send me away from you.”

“We will pray to see what's right,” said Martha, meekly. “You see, dear Nelly, there is plenty of time to consider.”

From the quiet way in which Mrs. Hone said this, no one could have guessed the extreme pain she felt at the thought of parting with Nelly.

The affair was considered again and again, and Martha unselfishly urged Nelly to go, and Rebecca and all the Reeves were consulted, and

some advised one thing and some another, but Nelly never swerved from her first opinion, and wrote a most grateful and affectionate answer to her kind brother, telling him she felt it to be her duty to remain with Mrs. Hone, unless he could show her it was not.

And John Mercer had good cause to rejoice that his sister refused his offer, for it made him the more willing a year after this to sell his business, and return to England with a pretty little capital, and to find in Fanny Reeve a wife it was well worth coming over the seas to obtain.

The young people took a shop in the pretty village near Shepherd's Farm, and Mrs. Hone and Nelly went to live in a cottage which joined it, and John Mercer persuaded Martha to sink the money she had in the funds in an annuity for her own and her sister's life, and thus Rebecca was able to give up her situation, and to live again with Martha; while Nelly found a happy home with her good brother.

"Well to be sure," cried the kind old Granny, Mrs. Reeve, "havn't we cause to be thankful? Who'd have thought, son, that our showing a bit of kindness to a poor little lonesome sickly neighbour would have turned out such a blessing to our darling Fanny? If I'd had a dozen husbands to pick and choose amongst for her, I couldn't have found a better than John Mercer."

"That's true as true can be, Mother," said Mr. Reeve. "Not that God always sees fit to reward us in this world in any way for doing good to a fellow-creature. When He does we can't be

thankful enough. It shows that He accepts our poor strivings to do His will."

Have our readers any curiosity to know what became of the avaricious Mrs. Jenkins? For a time all prospered with her, she continued to scrape and hoard until she had amassed many hundreds of pounds. Then cheated by a pretended friend, who had borrowed her money at high interest, she lost almost all she had saved, and became so suspicious and wretched that life itself was a burden to her.

What contrast could be greater than the two old neighbours, the widows, Mrs. Jenkins, and Mrs. Reeve?

We have tried in this little tale to teach, by Martha's history, that godliness with contentment is great gain; and by Mrs. Baisley's, that none who trust in God shall be desolate. That it is in vain we fill the heads of the young with Bible knowledge, unless we pray and strive that that knowledge may be brought home to their hearts. By Rebecca's, that by God's gracious mercy the heart may be purified in the furnace of affliction, even as gold is purified in the fire. By the two old widows, that the little that the righteous hath is better than the riches of the ungodly.

THE END.

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